

*This reading group guide for **Lana's War** includes an introduction, discussion questions, ideas for enhancing your book club, and a conversation with author **Anita Abriel**. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.*

Introduction

Paris 1943: Lana Antanova, grieving the death of her husband—a music teacher killed at the hands of an SS officer—finds purpose again when she's approached to join the Resistance on the French Riviera. As the daughter of a Russian countess, Lana has the perfect background to infiltrate the émigré society of Russian aristocrats who socialize with German officers, including the man who killed her husband. Lana's cover story makes her the mistress of Guy Pascal, a wealthy Swiss industrialist and fellow Resistance member, in whose villa in Cap Ferrat she lives. Together they gather information on upcoming raids and help members of the Jewish community escape. Consumed by her work, she doesn't expect to become attached to a young Jewish girl or wonder about the secrets held by the man whose house she shares. As the Nazis' deadly efforts intensify, her desire to protect the people she cares about puts them at risk, forcing her to make an impossible choice.

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. Chapter 1 ends with Lana having lost her husband and unborn child, as “the abstract fear had become something that happened to her” (p. 12). Consider what she must have thought and felt having now been directly touched by the war. How does this set the tone of the novel?
2. Lana's grief over Frederic's death is so strong she spends most of her time at the convent in the months following his murder, taking only one class at university. Could her conviction over his death be representative of a greater sense of loss? Discuss her motivations in taking up Henri on his offer.
3. Henri gave Lana a list of instructions on how to behave when gathering information from German officers: “always accept a man's offer of a cigarette because it made a good conversation starter; wear perfume because it made men stand a little closer and become more inclined to share their secrets” (p. 33). What are some other actions and ideas that would have been useful for Lana to use in these situations?
4. When Lana meets Guy, one of the first things he tells her is “I didn't mean to miss the train, but sometimes things happen that I can't control” (p. 42). How does this foreshadow the evolution of their relationship and the events that unfold?
5. Lana's relationship with Sylvie and Odette goes directly against Guy's orders to avoid emotional attachments. Do you think it is a natural maternal instinct that keeps Lana from staying away and has her bringing Odette presents? Is she filling the void of her own child by attempting to help these Jewish children?
6. When Lana bumps into Charles Langford after the noon cannon goes off, she remarks that the Riviera “feels like Paris before the war” (p. 139). Discuss the differences you've read about both settings and how the Riviera is changing for the worse.

7. Discuss how Lana's encounter with Captain Von Harmon in chapter 13 is still relevant to women's present-day experiences.
8. Guy finally reveals his past losses to Lana starting on page 198. How do each of their own experiences mirror the other's? Discuss their motivations for joining the Resistance. Why do you think Guy finally opens up to Lana?
9. After revealing her connection to Hans, Giselle tells Lana, "But think of something important I can do. You can't understand how I feel. I'm tired of this war, and I'm tired of hiding." Each of the characters involved in the Resistance is looking for "something important to do." How has this sentiment transcended history? What are some ways people are still looking for something important to do?
10. Discuss the difference between Lana's reaction to Frederic's death in the beginning of the novel and to Guy's disappearance later on. How does her reaction to Guy's disappearance show how her strength and ability in herself have grown?
11. Charles turns out to be an ally to the Resistance, offering to help Lana and Odette escape France. Discuss how Lana's choice not to escape to England shows her loyalty to Guy but also her newly discovered independence.
12. The novel ends ten years after the events on the Riviera with Lana living in the moment, choosing to go with Guy to Egypt. She has learned "there wasn't any point in worrying about the future. It was the present that was important" (p. 305). How is this sentiment representative of the world and the people at that time during and following World War II?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Throughout the novel we see many examples of women not following the traditional social constructs of the time. Lana turns the traditional role of women upside down by moving in with an unmarried man as well as by going back to school and eventually owning her own business. Giselle is a single woman living alone in a villa, and Sylvie's and Lana's mothers were both single parents. Discuss how each of these women is an example of early feminism. How do they personify women's empowerment and a more progressive belief in social norms?
2. When Lana and Giselle visit Grasse in chapter 6, Lana almost forgets about the war until the close proximity of an internment camp is discussed. Many of these areas have since been designated historical sites—for example, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, A Living Memorial to the Holocaust at Auschwitz—with thousands of tourists visiting them yearly. Given that we've seen how the world has moved on since, discuss the impact of today's internet culture on people's views: has it created an even greater gap in understanding this time in history due to what many deem disrespectful online posts of influencers at Holocaust remembrance sites, or has the internet helped to increase education and elevate the importance of these museums and sites?

A Conversation with Anita Abriel

Q: What was one of the more fascinating facts you learned from your research for this

novel?

A: One of the most fascinating things I learned was what was going on in the French Riviera during this time period. One hears so much about the fate of Jews in other parts of Europe: Germany, Poland, Hungary. It was chilling to learn what happened in an area that had been a safe and beautiful haven for Jews.

Q: Throughout your writing process, what have you found to be the most resourceful way to research World War II history?

A: I often start with the location, digging up as many articles and photos of the area during the time period, and then I read everything I can get my hands on. The internet is a great resource, as is my library. The stories my mother told me about the war are also very helpful in my writing and research.

Q: How much of Lana's War is factual and how much is fiction?

A: Everything about Alois Brunner is factual—how Brunner was determined to exterminate all the Jews on the Riviera and how he avoided capture for years after the war. I invented Lana and Guy, but everything about the hotels being taken over by the Nazis and the raids on Jewish neighborhoods is factual.

Q: The mother/daughter relationship is threaded throughout Lana's War and seen most strongly between Lana and her own mother, but also in Sylvie and Odette. Why did you choose to focus on these relationships?

A: Mother-and-daughter relationships are so important to me. My own relationship with my mother shaped me, and I like to write about similar relationships in my books. Mothers often have so much wisdom to impart to their daughters, and I have found there is nothing quite like a mother's love.

Q: Why was it important to you to tell the story about the effects World War II had on children throughout Europe, specifically in France?

A: The horrific thing about World War II, or any war, is the effect on children. Children are innocent bystanders in a war, but their whole lives are upended. During World War II, so many European children not only lost their parents; they also lost their heritage. It's important to write these stories down so there is a record of these events, and hopefully they won't keep happening.

Q: Why do you think female spies were such an integral part of the Resistance and intelligence networks throughout World War II?

A: Female spies were crucial to the Resistance because their presence in many situations wasn't suspicious. They could integrate themselves into places that men couldn't without causing alarm. Women have always been good at adapting to new roles; it's part of their nature. And I think women are much braver than they are given credit for. Many women I know would do anything for their families without hesitation. That level of sacrifice was merely increased during World War II.

Q: While a large part of Lana's War is about the romance between Lana and Guy, the story is ultimately about Lana discovering her own independence. Did you set out to write a novel about women pushing boundaries during World War II?

A: The novel evolved as I learned more about Lana's character. Romance is always important to me: I believe that love is one of the greatest gifts in life. But at the end of the day, one has to live with oneself. To be fulfilled as a woman, it's important to always be pushing boundaries. I was raised to believe women could do anything, as long as they worked hard and didn't give up on the things they believed in.

Q: Do you have a next project in mind? And, if so, what is it?

A: My next project is also set during World War II. It is about women and family and loss. With a good dose of hope thrown in!