



Book Club Questions

The Pirate Queen by Ariel Lawhon

Behind The Book:

Grace O'Malley, often called Ireland's "Pirate Queen," was a real sixteenth-century Irish chieftain, sailor, and political leader. While Ariel Lawhon imagines Grace's private thoughts, relationships, and conversations, many of the novel's major events—including her command of a fleet, her struggle against English rule, and her famous meeting with Queen Elizabeth I—are rooted in historical records.

Icebreaker Question:

If you could ask the real Grace O'Malley one question over dinner, what would you ask her?

Debate Starter:

Did Grace O'Malley's willingness to break the rules make her a hero, or did the ends not always justify the means?

Book Club Discussion Questions

1. How did the events and pressures of Grace's early life turn her into the ruthless commander she eventually became?
2. How does Grace cutting her braid symbolize her rejection of traditional gender roles in the sixteenth century, and where else in the book does she challenge expected female behavior?



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3. How did you feel when her father forced her to marry someone she hated? How does she manage to gain power and loyal followers within an abusive and restrictive marriage?
4. Grace's relationship with Merrick is one of the most complicated in the novel. To what extent was Grace responsible for the distance that grew between them? Did her final wish to see him change the way you viewed their relationship?
5. Why does Grace go to such extraordinary lengths-even sailing to London to confront Queen Elizabeth I face-to-face-to save Tibbot? Is her affection deeper for Tibbot, or is it that Tibbot remained loyal to her cause?
6. The book follows three stages of Grace's life: Maiden, Mother, and Matriarch. How did her priorities change after she became a mother? Is it possible to live a rebellious life while also protecting a family?
7. How did the strengths of Grace and Queen Elizabeth I differ? How do their interactions show the sacrifices that women in power must make for family and legacy?
8. Clan politics and betrayals are key to the story. Do you think Grace's true loyalty is to her family, her crew, or Ireland's independence?
9. Grace finds freedom on the water, but faces threats from English forces endangering her community. Can a leader truly be independent while responsible for others?



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10. Throughout the novel, Grace often chooses revenge over forgiveness. Do you think her desire for justice ultimately strengthened her, or did it come at too great a personal cost?

11. After reading the novel, do you think this title truly reflects who Grace O'Malley was, or does it miss the complexity of her life as a leader, mother, and survivor?

12. Did any parts of the fictional story change your view of historical female pirates?

13. How did the order of events affect your reading experience? Did moving back and forth between her youth and later years create tension, or did it make it harder to follow the many characters?

14. Do you think history judged Grace fairly? If she had been a man, would her legacy be remembered differently?

Book Club Questions by PrincetonBookReview

Content Warning: *The Pirate Queen features frequent heavy profanity, graphic maritime violence, and themes of sexual assault, coercion, and forced marriage.*