Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

# *Held*by Anne Michaels

1. Anne Michaels' background as a poet is a clear influence on *Held*, the language of which is spare, challenging and full of vivid imagery. How did *Held*'s 'poetic intensity' affect your reading of the novel? Did it heighten the book's emotional impact?
2. *Held* is structured unconventionally as a series of fragments, moving forwards and backwards in time, rather than as a traditional linear novel. Why do you think Michaels structured the book in this way? Do you think this fragmentary nature is a more accurate representation of the way we experience and remember our lives than novels that follow a more conventional path? Why or why not?
3. In the book, John and Helen run a photography business; Alan is a war photographer. Discuss the role that photography plays in the book and how it relates to the fact that *Held* is structured as a series of powerful and highly visual snapshots.
4. The book contains supernatural elements, such as when the photographs developed by John show ghostly apparitions of the dead. In a book about love, grief and the effects of trauma, why do you think Michaels introduced these otherworldly elements that defy explanation, and how did they affect your reading of the book?
5. The Booker Prize judges said, 'We loved the quietness of this book, and we surrendered to it.' Would you agree that *Held* is a 'quiet' novel, and to what extent is that a special or positive quality? Did you surrender to it, too?
6. Readers have speculated on the meaning of the book's title, and whether it refers to the physical act of holding or being held by a loved one, or the experience of holding a person or image in one's memory, or even the way opposing forces are *Held* in balance. What does the title mean to you?

The above questions were taken from

<https://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/detail/index.cfm/book_number/4774/held>

to enhance your discussion of the book.

Author Biography

Anne Michaels' books have been translated into more than forty-five languages and have won dozens of international awards, including the Orange Prize, the Guardian Fiction Prize, the Lannan Award for Fiction and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the Americas. She is the recipient of honorary degrees, the Guggenheim Fellowship and many other honours. She has been shortlisted for the Governor-General's Award, the Griffin Poetry Prize, twice shortlisted for the Giller Prize and twice longlisted for the IMPAC Award. Her novel, *Fugitive Pieces,* was adapted as a feature film. From 2015 to 2019, she was Toronto's Poet Laureate.

Author Website: <https://www.annemichaels.ca/>

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