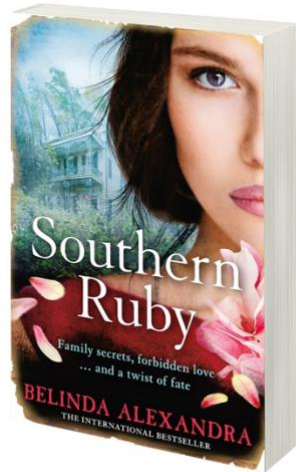


SOUTHERN RUBY

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS



WARNING: SPOILERS BELOW

1. What did you think about Ruby's attempts to get herself, Maman and Mae out of financial difficulties? Do you believe her only alternative was to become a burlesque dancer, or did she have other options? Would you have made the same choice in her situation?
2. Burlesque striptease in the 1950s was an entertainment directed at men. But the revival of traditional Burlesque led by stars such as Dita Von Teese attract mostly female audiences.
 - What is it about Burlesque dancing that might be appealing to modern women?
 - How do you feel about Burlesque striptease personally – is it a celebration of female sexuality and empowerment, harmless fun or a form of repression?
3. Music plays a major role in both Ruby and Amanda's stories. Have you been touched by music in a way that has changed or defined your life?

4. Amanda sees the world with an architect's eyes. The houses in *Southern Ruby* are richly described: Ruby's Apartment; *Amandine*; the Thezans' family home; Terence's house in the Lower Ninth Ward, Aunt Louise and Uncle Jonathan's house etc.

- Do you agree that the houses help demonstrate the inner lives of the characters and if so in what ways?
- The settings of Belinda Alexandra's books often focus on the symbolism of certain buildings. For example: Anya's home in Harbin (***White Gardenia***) contrasted with her new home in Sydney; the significance of the Paris Opera House to Paloma (***Golden Earrings***). Do you think the architecture and decor of your childhood home shaped your character in any way? Are there any buildings in your city that hold great emotional significance to you?

5. What does Estée's funeral scene represent to you? Some readers have been shocked by the graveyard scenes – how do the cultural ideas about death represented in *Southern Ruby* differ from your own?

6. Amanda is appalled by the racism of the USA's past – but what about the racism of the present? What do you think is the experience of black people in America today? Is it different to that of Ti-Jean and the young Leroy? Did the story make you reflect on racism in your own country or change your own views in any way?

7. Did anything you learned about New Orleans, the Civil Rights Movement, Burlesque or Hurricane Katrina surprise you?

8. Do you think Ruby and Leroy could have been happy?