



READING GROUP DISCUSSION IDEAS

THE MUSE

JESSIE BURTON

On a hot July day in 1967, Odelle Bastien climbs the stone steps of the Skelton gallery in London, knowing that her life is about to change forever. Having struggled to find her place in the city since she arrived from Trinidad five years ago, she has been offered a job as a typist under the tutelage of the glamorous and enigmatic Marjorie Quick. But though Quick takes Odelle into her confidence, and unlocks a potential she didn't know she had, she remains a mystery – no more so than when a lost masterpiece with a secret history is delivered to the gallery.

The truth about the painting lies in 1936 and a large house in rural Spain, where Olive Schloss, the daughter of a renowned art dealer, is harbouring ambitions of her own. Into this fragile paradise come artist and revolutionary Isaac Robles and his half-sister Teresa, who immediately insinuate themselves into the Schloss family, with explosive and devastating consequences...



Seductive, exhilarating and suspenseful, *The Muse* is an unforgettable novel about aspiration and identity, love and obsession, authenticity and deception – a masterpiece from the million-copy bestselling author of *The Miniaturist*.

1. *The Muse* weaves together stories set in 1960s London and 1930s Spain. How evocative did you find these settings and what did you learn about life at that time? Did you prefer one of these plot strands to the other?
2. Odelle and Olive both have to overcome obstacles in order to pursue their artistic passions. Are there other similarities between these two characters?
3. Of all the characters in the novel, whose life do you feel was most affected by the painting that connects them all?
4. There are many examples of a close female friendship in the novel – which left the deepest impression on you? Would you say the characters' friendships or their romantic relationships ultimately shaped them most?
5. What did you make of Isaac Robles and his involvement in both the Schloss family and the rising tensions in Spain?
6. Teresa struggles to keep Olive's secret. Do you feel she acted with Olive's best interests at heart? What would you have done?
7. What did you make of Marjorie Quick and her role in Odelle's life?
8. *The Muse* explores the relationship between an artist or writer and their creative work – how important do you think the identity of the creator is to a piece of art or writing?
9. The women in *The Muse* all hide a part of themselves. Why do you think they each feel compelled to do so, and are there similar pressures on women today?
10. Has a book or work of art ever changed your life – if so, what was it and can you describe the effect it had on you?