

## HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again!  
All you need is a little bit of organization and some  
friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are.

### HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

**The best way to find people to be in your reading group is to ask your friends.**  
Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with 6–8 people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your reading group, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

### **Figure out when and where you want to meet.**

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group and so YOU get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

### **Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run.**

Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

**The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a reading group. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!**

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit  
[www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians](http://www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians)

It takes great strength to soar above it  
all and realize your dreams.



### Flygirl

by Sherri Smith

978-0-399-2470-5 (HC) • \$16.99

978-0-14-241725-6 (PB) • \$7.99

Ages: 12 & up • Grades 7 up

★ "This breakthrough title adds a new story to the shelves of World War II books. The details...are exciting, but tougher than any flight maneuver are Ida Mae's...feelings that culminate in an unforgettable climax."

—*Booklist*, starred review

### AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- A California Book Award Gold Medal Winner
- A ALA Amelia Bloomer Project Selection
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- An ALA/YALSA Teen's Top Ten Nomination
- A Children's Book Council Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People
- A Capitol Choices Noteworthy Book for Children
- A Texas Tayshas High School Reading List Selection
- Nominated for four state award lists!



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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

It takes great strength to soar above it all.

# FLYGIRL

*Sherri L. Smith*



"A dynamic,  
heartfelt novel."  
—*The Washington Post*

## ABOUT THE BOOK



Ida Mae Jones wants nothing more than to fly planes like she did before her daddy died, but farm girls living in WWII-era Louisiana are expected to keep their feet on the ground—especially if they’re black. When Ida Mae reads of the Women Airforce Service Pilots program, she decides to try and join. WASP won’t accept black women but Ida Mae is light-skinned, so she makes the dangerous choice to “pass”: she pretends she’s white. Passing as a white girl, she convinces the local WASP interviewer that she has the guts to fly.

WASP training is tough. Ida Mae faces challenges such as instructors who think women shouldn’t fly planes as well as planes that malfunction. With the help of devoted sister WASPs Patsy Kake and Lily Lowenstein, she perseveres. But even Patsy and Lily don’t know that she’s hiding her race. As Ida Mae flies planes she never dreamed she’d have a chance to fly, she must also decide who she really wants to be.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SHERRI L. SMITH began writing *Flygirl* as a master’s thesis project after hearing about the WASP program on public radio. She currently lives in Los Angeles, where she has worked in movies, animation, comic books and construction. Her first book, *Lucy the Giant*, was an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults in 2003, and her other books have received commendations, including the

NCSS-CBC Notable Children’s Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies for both 2006 and 2009.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Where does the word “flygirl” come from? Why do you think this word is the novel’s title?
- In *Flygirl*, Sherri L. Smith uses the terms “Negro” and “colored,” which were commonly used in the 1940s but aren’t used now. What do you think of her choice to use these terms? How would using contemporary terms have changed her novel?

- After returning home, Thomas uses a derogatory term for the Japanese, “Nips” (pg 196). Why isn’t Ida Mae or anyone else offended? Are there any circumstances in which derogatory terms like this one are acceptable? Explain your answer.
- Ida Mae and other characters frequently discuss different skin shades of brown and white. Why are these different skin shades important to them? How does their skin shade affect them and their interactions with others?
- Do you think pretending to be something you’re not would be easy or difficult? What parts of passing as white give Ida Mae the most trouble? Do you think she would react differently if she were able to be honest about her racial identity?
- Why are female flyers like Bessie Coleman, Amelia Earhart, Jackie Cochran, and Nancy Love role models for Ida Mae? Who are your role models, and why are they important to you?
- Why does Ida Mae respect institutions owned and run by black Americans, like the Coffey School of Aeronautics? What purpose did such institutions serve in 1940s America? If there were a special school for you, based on your interests, background, or gender, would you go there? Explain why you made your choice and what benefits or downsides there might be in going to that school.
- Why are so many items rationed in *Flygirl*? How does rationing help contribute to the war effort? What items would you be willing to do without and why? What items would you be unwilling to give up and why?
- Ida Mae lies about her racial identity and heritage when applying to and participating in the WASP program. Why does she do this? Do her reasons justify her lying? What would you do in her situation?
- Why do some characters in *Flygirl* say WASP are “easy women” (p 147)? How does this stereotype affect military personnel and civilians’ treatment of WASP? Do you think people still stereotype women in the military this way?
- Why do the WASP and other characters disagree over the proper role of women during WWII? How do you feel about roles women currently serve during wars? In what ways might women’s current war roles affect women you care for?
- What qualities must a successful WASP in *Flygirl* have? How do each of these help the women succeed? Are any of those qualities universal to success? What qualities do you have that might help you to reach your life goals?
- In *Flygirl*, many of the WASP have nicknames. How did they get them and what makes them important to the characters? Do you think their nicknames are more accurate than their given names? How have people you’ve known received nicknames? Are these names important to them?

- Although Patty and Lily don’t know Ida Mae’s deepest secret, she considers them to be good friends. Can they truly be her close friends if they don’t know this very important thing about her? How is their friendship different from Jolene’s friendship? What makes someone a close friend?
- On page 167, Ida Mae says: “All I could think of was wanting to fly. The war was just an opportunity. It wasn’t real. But it’s real now. It means my brother is missing. It means my mother has lost her husband and now maybe her son. And she came all this way, letting me treat her worse than a dog, just to tell me.” How does Ida Mae’s participation in the war change her perception of it? Does her changed view of war influence her feelings about participating in it? What about her experience makes it worth continuing her involvement in the war?
- Two characters in particular, Patsy and Thomas, sacrifice a great deal for WWII. Are their sacrifices worth what they and America gains? Why or why not? Would you be willing to make similar sacrifices?
- Two songs become important to Ida Mae: “Shoo Fly” and the WASP song about zoot suits. How do these songs aid her in difficult times? What songs have most helped you through difficulties and why? Why are songs so important to people when they’re troubled?
- What risks would Ida Mae be taking if she decides to pass as white long-term? How might these risks affect her future relationships, both romantic and with friends? What do you think of her choices in regards to “passing” and Walt? What alternative choices might she have made? What choice would you have made if you were her and why?
- How is Ida Mae’s relationship with each of her family members changed by her experiences as a WASP? Were the changes for the better, for the worse, or both?

## RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES

- Research the types of planes mentioned in *Flygirl*: Curtiss JN-4, PT-19A, Link Trainer, Valiant, and B-29. Sketch and label important parts of these planes. Write a short description of ways the planes have been used, as well as evaluations of their strengths and weaknesses.
- At the end of *Flygirl*, Ida Mae says she sent a letter to Walt Jenkins telling him about her race and heritage. Pretend you are Ida Mae and write the letter she mails to Walt Jenkins.
- Investigate pioneer pilots Bessie Coleman, Amelia Earhart, Jackie Cochran, and Nancy Love. Create a multimedia presentation that includes information on their lives, their careers, and ways in which they influenced other pilots.