

*Little Bee, by Chris Cleaves*

Review for the MFC Book Club written by Kimberly Mach

The MFC Book Club met recently to discuss the book, *Little Bee*, by Chris Cleaves. This book, a New York Times Bestseller, brought several new faces to the discussion, which was important because the nature of the book forces its reader to open his or her eyes and get a bit uncomfortable. It was beneficial to talk with several other people about the issues, the moral and ethical dilemmas, and good to see how each of us responded to those questions as we considered the state of the world and our place in it.

Little Bee, having lost all her family, is a refugee fleeing from Nigeria. She makes her way to Great Britain, and seeks out the only people she knows in that country, Sarah and Andrew. The three met by chance on a beach in Nigeria, two years before, when their lives became inextricably linked and Little Bee's sister lost her life.

Each of the characters in this story of human rights had a particular role, and our group found ourselves discussing those roles for the better part of an hour. Little Bee played the part of the refugee, the forgotten Africa, while Sarah and Andrew played the role of privileged whites, who sometimes have an idealized version of the world and their protected place in it. Bribes of money were offered by both Sarah and Andrew as a way to solve the problems facing them on the beach in Africa. The money never solved the problem, and the attempts were met with adverse reactions and long-term, life-changing consequences.

Little Bee is a story that stays with you because the issue is now, real-time, and that of a contemporary Africa. You will find yourself opening your eyes and looking at the world a bit differently. What are the repercussions of discovering oil where a village

currently stands? What happens to a village when someone with money, a company, decides that the land has worth? Where do the people go who once lived on the land? Do we accept refugees with open arms? Do we accept both the tired and poor? As one member so aptly put it, when it comes down to it are we willing to share our piece of the pie with someone who hasn't any? And finally, the most difficult question: Where does our responsibility lie? One thing is for certain. There is no such thing as an African problem. There is no such thing as a Middle Eastern problem, or a solely American problem; there is only Our Problem.

Chris Cleaves ends his book with his own thoughts about evil and how it can be dealt with. To eradicate it we have to educate, plant one seed, and change one person, at a time. But it's more than that. There will always be conflict; it is part of what makes us human; we have, after all, free will. As human beings, our wants and desires often run into the wants and desires of others. Viola. Conflict. What makes us better is how we deal with that conflict. Cutting ourselves off from the rest of the world is not the answer. Building walls is not the answer. Throwing money at a problem, as shown by the characters in the book, is not the answer. So what is? Making conscious choices each moment in time. Caring for our fellow man, whether we are called to leave our homes and travel abroad, or work right in the center of our own communities. Caring for one another is what can eventually eradicate evil. One step, one action, at a time.

Join us in our own chipping away and discussing the solutions as we embark on our next discussion with Jodi Picoult's *House Rules*. *House Rules* pulls the conflict of understanding right to our home field as a mother struggles against prejudice and

intolerance when the town accuses her son of murder. Her son is different. Her son has Asperger's Syndrome. Help us solve this, one story, one understanding at a time.

Join us Monday, March 19, at 7 pm to discuss *House Rules* by Jodi Picoult; guaranteed discussion to make you think.