

Book club 32: Activism & engagement

Off the Record
by Camryn Garrett

Rules

In this book club you will discuss *Off the Record* by Camryn Garrett in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story. Each group member consults the group about elements of the text that they thought was unclear. Together, you try to find answers to the questions that are raised. After everything has been cleared up, your group is ready to proceed to the next round.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is where you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



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Introduction

'I have the sinking, horrible feeling that Marius knows what Lennox has done and wants to ignore it so he can work with a great director. That's what Tallulah wanted, too, but she had to deal with weeks of sexual harassment.' (p. 189)

At the age of seventeen, Josie Wright is already a dedicated journalist. She enters a contest organised by her favourite magazine and wins. Her prize is going on a press tour and writing a cover story about Marius Canet, a young movie star. Equally terrified and excited, Josie struggles to keep her anxiety from getting the better of her as she goes from press conferences to release parties. She enters the dazzling world of Hollywood but soon realises it isn't as glamorous as it seems. When one of the stars on the film confides in her, Josie finds out that a well-known director has been sexually harassing actresses throughout his career, but no one in the industry talks about it.

Josie needs to find a way to navigate the ethics of journalism while dealing with her own self-doubt and anxiety. *Off the Record* explores themes of sexual assault, the responsibilities of journalism, and, above all, the power of women supporting each other.

Round 1: Understanding the plot

Take turns turning over a card and answering the question. After the person whose turn it is has answered, the rest may add to that answer or share their own views.

Round 2: Initial questions

Take turns selecting one of the excerpts (*fragmenten/stukjes*) from the book listed below. Think of a question you would like to ask one of the characters, and work together to find an answer to that question.

1. The sisters are trying on clothes: 'It doesn't take ... for this moment.' (p. 33-35)
2. Josie interviews Marius during his fitting: "Come on," ... dress this beautiful.' (p. 78-79)
3. Alice and Josie talk to Maggie on the phone: 'Maggie has always ... to the hotel.'" (p. 87-88)

Round 3: Discussion

Take turns turning over a card from a pile of your choice and answer the discussion question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Opinion

Review *Off the Record* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

What cities does Josie visit during the Press Tour?

Question 2

What does Josie take to the press conference for good luck?

Question 3

Who are in the Lonely Hearts Club?

Question 4

Why does Josie lie to Marius about which song by A Tribe Called Quest it is?

Question 5

According to Josie, when do Black films receive critical acclaim?

Answers

- 1 Los Angeles, Austin, Chicago, Atlanta and New York
- 2 Alice's smile
- 3 Penny, Marius, and Josie
- 4 Because the song is about sex and that makes her uncomfortable
- 5 When they heavily feature Black suffering



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? 1

Josie's parents are worried about her at the beginning of the book, because they think Josie does not have any friends. How would you feel in Josie's position? Do you think her parents are right to be concerned? Explain your answer.

Personal connections? 2

In the beginning of the book Josie explains what 'mirror time' is. She says she does not mind doing it, yet she doesn't seem to take it seriously when she practices it: 'It sounds like something from Barney' (p. 18). Look up "Barney & Friends" first and then answer the questions: Why do you think Josie finds it difficult to give herself a sincere compliment?

Personal connections? 3

Josie's sister Alice comes along on the press tour as Josie is still a minor. Though seventeen is quite young to be working as a journalist, actors also often start their careers at a young age. Can you imagine yourself as a journalist or an actor at seventeen? What do you think that would be like?

Personal connections? 4

Alice tells Marius about Josie's anxiety without Josie's knowledge. Josie is angry when she finds out: "It's *my* information to tell people" (p. 84). Do you understand why Alice told Marius? Would you feel the same as Josie? Why or why not?

Personal connections? 5

When Josie and Marius are in the cab, he tells her that "it's not a crime to take up space" (p. 154). In this example they are indirectly talking about weight and bodies. In what other ways can people take up space? Explain your answer.

Personal connections? 6

On their walk in Central Park, Josie and Marius are approached by a couple of girls who ask for a picture. Josie thinks the girls look perfect and immediately starts comparing herself to them. She creates an image in her head of what the girls must see when they look at her. Why do you think she does that? Do you think those girls are actually thinking those things about Josie?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4



Food for thought? 1

When Josie asks Marius how race influenced his performance in the movie, Marius answers that race did influence the way he played his character, Peter, because Peter is the only Black person in his community. The director, however, adds to this by saying “this isn’t a story about race. Marius just happens to be Black” (p. 95). Why do you think Marius and the director have such different responses to the question?

Food for thought? 2

Josie thinks about ‘cancel culture’ and whether it’s possible to separate the work from the creator. She says that she can accept more bad behaviour from freedom fighters like Martin Luther King Jr., but not from movie directors like Woody Allen. What do you think about this? Do you think it’s fair? Use examples from the book in your discussion.

Food for thought? 3

When Josie and Penny talk about sexual assault, Josie doesn’t seem to think that what happened to her is as bad as what happened to other people. Penny says: “It’s not – it’s not like it’s a contest. You don’t have to hit certain amount of points to be included” (p. 162). Do agree with Penny? Why do you think Josie feels this way?

Food for thought? 4

Alice and Josie talk about the fact that they are noticing differences in the way people react to sexual assault and abuse when it concerns women of color: “they all know each other (...) But they didn’t notice the same thing happening to women of color?” (p. 218). What do you think Josie means by that? Can you give another example of where you may have seen this happen in real life?

Food for thought? 5

When Josie is struggling with finishing the cover story, she worries that she cannot be objective because she is too close to the subject. Her friend tries to help: “I don’t think it’s possible to ever be completely objective... We should always try to, but I don’t think it can happen” (p. 260). Is it possible to be completely objective? Can you explain your answer?

Food for thought? 6

In light of everything that Lennox did, Josie questions whether it is irresponsible to date or even like guys. When she talks to Penny about it, Penny says that she doesn’t want to risk getting hurt again so she does not date. Do you agree with Penny’s viewpoint? Explain your answer.



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

6

Food for thought?

5

Food for thought?

4