



BOOK CLUB KIT

LETTER FROM REGINA
FAMILY TREE
READING GROUP GUIDE
RECIPES



DEAR READERS

Greetings. I hope this letter finds you comfortable and well. Thank you for choosing *The Travelers* for your book group. I hope you enjoy the journey. There's quite the cast of recurring characters to meet and greet you and, boy, do they have stories to tell. Maybe you'll glimpse a bit of yourself or someone you know in the man James, Agnes, Eddie, Sigrid, Claudia, Rufus, Beverly, Eloise, Adele, Jebediah, Barbara, Charles and Hank. Their adventures take them halfway around the world and, like most of us, they carry their experiences with them wherever they go and leave their footprints behind. I wrote this book because there's no one way to travel. You can travel with your hands in your pockets or standing still. You can travel across a dance floor or while dreaming in bed. You can travel back in time to your childhood or while sitting across the table from a relative, lover, or childhood friend. What does travel mean to you? I'm more than a little curious to know. What's the best travel experience you've ever had or the one that required the most endurance? What's on your bucket list of places to see and who'd you like to see those places with? I sure wish I could be there to hear your responses. Savor an appetizer or two for me.

Rogha M. R.

CONNECTING ROOTS IN

THE TRAVELERS

CHARLES CAMPHOR
BANKER

BARBARA CAMPHOR
LOVER TO THE
MAN JAMES

HERBERT DELANEY
CANNERY
WORKER

DOLORES DELANEY
CANNERY
WORKER

BIG SEAMUS CAMPHOR
CHARLES'
FIRST COUSIN

HANK CAMPHOR
DARK-HAIRED SON

TESS CAMPHOR
3-YEAR OLD

ELOISE DELANEY
ADVENTURER
AGNES'S CHILDHOOD
FRIEND AND LOVER

KING TYRONE
FISHERMAN

DEIDRE TYRONE
MARINE BIOLOGIST

FLORA APPLEWOOD
ELOISE'S FRIEND
AND LOVER/RETIRED
SOCIAL WORKER

JEBEDIAH APPLEWOOD
BLUE WATER VET/
MOVING MAN

REUBEN APPLEWOOD
NAVAL OFFICER

LEVI APPLEWOOD

ROYAL APPLEWOOD
TAXICAB DRIVER

AGNES CHRISTIE
URBAN PLANNER

EDDIE CHRISTIE
BLUE WATER VET, FIRST COUSIN
TO THE APPLEWOODS

ADELE PRANSKY
ARTIST

JAMES SAMUEL VINCENT, JR.
(THE MAN JAMES)

SIGRID VINCENT
CASTING AGENT

KEVIN PARKER
BORDER CONTROL
EX-HUSBAND

BEVERLY CHRISTIE
REGISTERED
NURSE

CHICO
ROTI-SELLING
EX-BOYFRIEND

CLAUDIA CHRISTIE
SHAKESPEARE
SCHOLAR

RUFUS VINCENT
SON OF THE
MAN JAMES

MINERVA C. PARKER
BEVERLY'S DAUGHTER

PETER 'PEANUT' PARKER
BEVERLY'S SON

KEISHA AND LAMAR
4-YEAR-OLD TWINS

ELIJAH AND WINONA
5-YEAR-OLD TWINS

READING GUIDE

"HISTORY SURROUNDS US. EVIDENCE OF HOW WE CAME INTO BEING, MUTATED, HAD CHILDREN."

1 In the seven-page opening of *The Travelers*, "Pass It On," Regina Porter swiftly runs through six decades in the life of one of the novel's central characters: "the man" James Samuel Vincent, Jr. Throughout the rest of the book, however, the author adds layers and texture to her characters by delving into their family histories and the intergenerational traumas that travel through time and country. With reference to specific moments in the text, how did Porter capture the specificities of place and time in the many different eras and locations of this book? Did you feel that you gradually gained a greater sense of understanding for individual characters as you learned more about their origins and the experiences of their family members?

2 *The Travelers* does not follow a linear narrative trajectory, but jumps back and forth in time and between the perspectives of different characters. How did this affect your reading experience?

3 In this book, Regina Porter's writing has a strong focus on causality, or how certain events and choices have life-altering effects on individuals. For example, if Agnes Miller had married Claude Johnson instead of Eddie Christie, an entirely different cast of characters would have existed in *The Travelers*. What other examples of cause and effect can you pull from the novel, and how do you think things would have turned out differently had these instances not occurred?

4 How does this book convey the ways in which human beings are shaped and altered by their encounters and relationships with one another? You might choose to discuss, for example, how children are influenced by their parents or how certain characters are motivated to differentiate themselves from those of previous generations.

5 Did this novel remind you of any "great" books of the American literary tradition? How might *The Travelers* cast light on or add complexity to themes that have traditionally been overlooked in the American canon, such as homosexual and interracial relationships? Did reading this book in any way challenge your view of the ways in which certain social and political issues have, in the past, been represented or painted-over in mainstream literature and other art forms?

6 The literature of William Shakespeare is of deep significance for several characters in *The Travelers*. For example, Sister Mary Laranski proclaims to her pupils that "a life without Shakespeare is no life at all," while Eddie Christie finds relief in reciting passages from Tom Stoppard's play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and Eddie's daughter, Claudia, becomes a Shakespeare scholar. Why do you think the appreciation of Shakespeare has endured through centuries and into the present day, and how is it relevant to this novel?

7 Much like even the most tragic Shakespearean dramas, *The Travelers* is interspersed with many moments of comic relief. How do you see Porter's characters retain a sense of humor even during times of intense sadness? What for you were the funniest moments in the book?

8 Agnes and Eddie each carry unspeakable traumas with them through most of their lives. How do memories of traumatic events manifest in their behavior over the years?

9 Although Charles Camphor discourages his son Hank's friendship with the Applewoods, a neighboring black family, he displays profound generosity for Jerome Jenkins, "the only black boy in Hank's grade at Sunset Beach School." Given the contempt Charles seems to have for the Applewoods, why do you think he extends such kindness to Jerome?

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READING GUIDE

11 Adele Pransky's children noticed that their father Yan, "never mentioned his mother or his family or anything about his childhood. And he bristled if they or Adele inquired or asked. The siblings did not know what was more unnerving: that they had to live with Yan or that he had no past." Thinking back to your answers to Question 1, do you think it is more difficult to have empathy for Yan than for other characters, having learned no concrete details about his dark past?

12 Fire and water are recurring motifs in *The Travelers*, particularly in the form of burning houses or in characters' fears of death by drowning. The elements air and earth similarly recur, seen in Eloise's affinity for flight and in Rufus's connection to the land through his Joycean scholarship (for, as his father mentions, "Joyce is land"). Where else did you notice the four elements crop up in the novel? What do you think they represent in the context of its narrative?

13 When Claudia seeks marriage advice from her mother, Adele is baffled by the question of "loving someone enough instead of loving him, or her, in the moment and sticking to the truth of that love because you never knew which day would be your last."

Did *The Travelers* prompt you to question your understandings and definitions of love and marriage? How does this novel convey that love, or the love one might have for a partner or family member, is not static, but fluid or malleable, taking different forms at different moments in time?

14 Consider the final passage of *The Travelers*, in which Agnes Christie re-encounters one of the men from that definitive night on Damascus Road:

"The former officer William Byrd brought over the pecan pie, favoring his limp leg. Agnes shut her eyes and clutched Beverly and Claudia's hands tighter than she had when they were crossing the street as kids. She waited a second before she opened them. The former officer William Byrd had retreated into the kitchen. 'I am glad you came to see after me, girls. I'm glad you brought the kids.' And then Agnes smiled and batted her long lashes at them. She might have been young again, in her prime: so many lives and selves in one body. '*Pecan pie is entirely too sweet for me. But you all enjoy it. We're here. Dig in.*'" [303]

What thoughts and emotions might Agnes have grappled with internally when she saw William Byrd, and how do you think she managed to keep her composure? What do you think is the meaning of the line "so many lives and selves in one body"?

15 As a piece of literature, *The Travelers* illuminates ideologically entrenched prejudices in America from 1946 to 2010, shortly after the election of Barack Obama, the first black man to become President of the United States. Years after the periods in which *The Travelers* is set, it has often been claimed that the people of America have become more divided than ever. Would you agree with such a statement? In your answer, you should try to explain why you think society has continued to move toward intersectional equality, or why you think it has regressed into further intolerances and divisions. Why do you think this has happened and what do you think is the way forward from here?

APPETIZERS AND DRINK IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

LOCAL FLAVOR SPANNING TIME AND PLACE, INSPIRED BY THE CHARACTERS AND LOCATIONS FROM *THE TRAVELERS*

BARBARA CAMPHOR'S ON-THE-SLY DEVEILED EGGS

If you're not feeling like store-bought, this one is simple enough for the novice home cook

INGREDIENTS

6 eggs
¼ cup *Blue Plate mayonnaise*
(a southern classic) or
Hunt's Ketchup
1 teaspoon *sweet pickle relish*
1 teaspoon *yellow or grainy*
Dijon mustard
Dash of *Tabasco*
Sprinkle of *paprika*
Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Place eggs in a single layer in a saucepan and cover with enough water so there's 1½ inches of water above the eggs. Heat on high until water begins to boil, then cover, turn the heat to low, and cook for 1 minute. Remove from heat and leave covered for 14 minutes.

Rinse under cold water continuously for 1 minute. Crack eggshells and carefully peel under cool running water. Gently dry with paper towels. Slice the eggs in half lengthwise, removing yolks to a medium bowl, and placing the whites on a serving platter.

Mash the yolks into a fine crumble using a fork. Add mayonnaise or ketchup, pickle relish, mustard, Tabasco, salt, and pepper, and mix well.

Evenly disperse heaping teaspoons of the yolk mixture into the egg whites. Sprinkle with paprika and serve.

(adapted from Mary Nolan's *Classic Deviled Eggs* recipe, courtesy of The Food Network)

AGNES CHRISTIE'S SUMMER TOMATO SALAD

Inspired by the fresh tomatoes and cucumbers straight from Agnes's Bronx garden

INGREDIENTS

6 to 8 ripe tomatoes
2 medium cucumbers
½ red onion
1 cup *extra-virgin olive oil*
2 tablespoons *brown sugar*
Salt and *freshly ground*
black pepper
Handful *fresh parsley leaves*,
lightly chopped
Juice of 1 lemon
1 avocado (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Cut the tomatoes into 4 wedges, then cut the wedges in half and add to a bowl. Cut the onion and cucumber in ½-inch pieces. Add to the tomatoes. For a Mediterranean twist, throw in the avocado, sliced in ½-inch pieces.

Add olive oil, brown sugar, dash of salt and pepper, and juice of 1 lemon to a jar. Screw on the lid and shake to combine. Pour the dressing over the vegetable mixture and toss. Add the parsley and gently toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate a few hours before serving.

(adapted from Ree Drummond's *Marinated Tomato Salad with Herbs* recipe, courtesy of The Food Network)

APPETIZERS AND DRINK IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

LADY MILLER'S SOUTHERN LEMON CAKE

A southern classic from a top-notch baker

INGREDIENTS

1 cup salted butter, softened
3 cups granulated sugar
6 large eggs
2 tablespoons lemon zest, plus
additional for garnish
1/3 cup fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
3 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1 (8-oz.) container sour cream

FOR GLAZE

2 cups confectioners' sugar
3 to 4 tablespoons fresh
lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325°F. Beat butter with a heavy-duty electric stand mixer at medium speed until creamy, about 1 minute. Gradually add sugar, beating until light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beating just until blended after each addition. Stir in lemon zest, fresh lemon juice, and vanilla.

Stir together flour, salt, and baking soda in a medium bowl. Add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with sour cream, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Beat at low speed just until blended after each addition. Pour batter into a greased (with shortening) and floured 10-inch tube pan.

Bake in preheated oven until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 1 hour, 15 minutes to 1 hour, 30 minutes. Cool in pan on a wire rack 10 minutes; remove cake from pan to wire rack, and cool completely, about 2 hours.

Prepare glaze: While cake is cooling, place confectioners' sugar in a medium bowl or liquid measuring cup; stir in lemon juice (glaze should be thick, yet pourable). Add more sugar or lemon juice, as necessary, to achieve desired consistency. Once cake is sufficiently cooled, spoon glaze over cake. Sprinkle with lemon zest.

If desired, serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or gelato.

(adapted from Lemon-Vanilla Pound Cake with Lavender Glaze recipe, courtesy of *Southern Living*)

THE CHURCH LADIES' MINT JULEPS

Because you don't want to be the subject of their gossip

INGREDIENTS

10 mint leaves, plus a sprig
for garnish
1½ teaspoons superfine sugar
Seltzer water
Crushed ice
2 ½ ounces Kentucky
bourbon whiskey

DIRECTIONS

Place the mint leaves in the bottom of an old-fashioned glass and top with sugar. Muddle together until the leaves begin to break down.

Add a splash of seltzer water, fill the glass 3/4 full with crushed ice, and add the bourbon. Top with another splash of seltzer, stir, and garnish with a sprig of mint. Serve immediately.

(adapted from Alton Brown's Mint Julep recipe, courtesy of *The Food Network*)

OTHER IDEAS FOR A BOOKISH FEAST

**MANY RECIPES
CAN BE FOUND
ONLINE—CHOOSE
YOUR FAVORITE
AND CUSTOMIZE
UNTIL IT HAS
AS MUCH
CHARACTER AS
THESE FOLKS**

KING TYRONE'S DO-IT-YOURSELF JUMBO SHRIMP COCKTAIL

From the master fisherman himself—peel and eat for a simple treat

EDDIE CHRISTIE'S BRONX BRUSCHETTA

An Italian classic to please the crowds, straight from the Boogie Down

CHARLES CAMPHOR'S FRONT PORCH OLD-FASHIONED

Classic and laid back, but maybe goes down a little too smooth

ADELE AND THE MAN JAMES'S CLASSIC LONG ISLAND MARTINI

It's okay to make them with a heavy pour. Just make sure there are no children around.

THE CHURCH LADIES' REGULAR & INSPIRED SWEET TEA

Everyone's auntie has their go-to recipe. Choose your own and add a little whiskey if you'd prefer.

SEAMUS CAMPHOR'S CRISPY CORN FRITTERS

Big flavor from the big man himself