

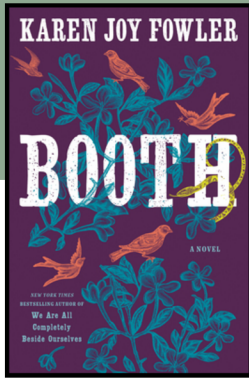
Discussion Questions

August 20

6:30 p.m.

COVER TO COVER

Booth



by

Karen Joy Fowler

BOOK CLUB

- 1 Booth is a story about John Wilkes Booth, an infamous figure in American history. But Karen Joy Fowler doesn't center the narrative on John, instead choosing to tell the story of the Booth family, from the struggles of his parents to his many siblings. Why do you think Fowler chose to write this story in this way?
- 2 Fowler's last book, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, was organized around a secret—a secret that the characters know but the reader does not. *Booth* is organized around something the reader knows but the characters do not. How did your awareness of Lincoln's assassination impact your reading?
- 3 The Booths live in a two-story, two-room log cabin miles from any major city. How are the Booths perceived in their insular neighborhood deep in the woods? What effect do you think this secluded location has on the children's development—particularly that of Edwin, John, and Rosalie?
- 4 According to Booth family lore, soon after John was born, "a flame rose from the ashes and, shaping itself into an arm, stretched toward the baby as if to knight him" (p. 60). In that flame, John's mother read the word *Country*, followed by John's name—a promise of a glorious fate. How aware do you think John, growing up, was of his own prophecy?
- 5 On page 220, Fowler writes that Asia "dreams she's being swept away, one of a great many unlikely things bobbing in the current—books, cats, hats, chairs, a cow, and a banjo." Would you describe Asia as a dreamer? How so? How do you think this quality led her to live her life outside convention? To see her brother John through a certain lens?
- 6 What was the role of women in the Booth family? Why was it respectable to be an actor but not to be an actress? Were you surprised, during the interlude on the farm after Junius's death, that three grown women would leave the survival of the family entirely in the hands of a fifteen-year-old boy?
- 7 Do you think Rosalie's lion-tamer romance was real or just a fantasy that sustained her? Why did she believe that John had had a secret marriage and left a child behind when none of the other siblings believed this?
- 8 Edwin and Joe each believe that they are the Booth sibling with the worst childhood. Which Booth would you argue had the most to feel aggrieved about? Did their mother take good care of them?
- 9 Junius Booth, as the most famous stage actor of his time, held on to his vast spotlight, both onstage and at home. How did the Booth children try—and often fail—to come out from under his shadow? What made Edwin so determined to follow in his father's footsteps? Do you think John pursued theater for the same reasons?
- 10 Slavery was the great issue of the day and yet, with the exception of John, the Booths seldom seem to have spoken of it. How is it possible to ignore something so ubiquitous and contentious and unjust, especially given their deep connection to the Hall family?