



# Discussion Guide

MARGARET ATWOOD  
THE HANDMAIDS TALE



## About the Book

Book Title: Handmaid's Tale

Author: Margaret Atwood

Published: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart :1985

Author Website: [margaretatwood.ca/](http://margaretatwood.ca/)

## Questions for Discussion

1. **What were your general impressions of this book?**
2. **Atwood creates a “dystopian” society in the book, the opposite of a utopian society. What did you think about this realm she created and what would you guess was her purpose in creating such a book?**
3. **What parts of the book, if any, seemed realistic or something you or others have experienced? Explain.**
4. **What was the role of men in this book? The Commanders? The servants? Why do you think some men were being killed? Were the men free? Why or why not?**
5. **This novel, set in the future, takes women back to a state of domination by men. Do you think this is possible? Why or why not?**
6. **In what ways did the women in the book resist oppression? Have you seen similar stories in the past and/or present? Explain**
7. **Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?**
8. **In what ways, if any, will this book change your life or perspective?**

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*If you have Hulu, watch the Handmaid's Tale series. Or watch these on YouTube:*

*“Writer Margaret Atwood on her book*

*The Handmaid's Tale and the state of US politics today”*

*“Margaret Atwood on The Handmaid's Tale”*

*“The Handmaid's Tale: Margaret Atwood and showrunner Bruce Miller (full panel) |  
BookCon 2017”*



**NANCY:** The Handmaid's Tale, written over 30 years ago, is making a resurgence in a TV series by the same name. And so our book club tackled this "dystopian" novel in which Atwood very hauntingly writes into being a very scary society, the opposite of a utopia. I found the story difficult and painful to read. She's a very talented writer who knows how to tell a good story, weaving in so much thought and perspective through the eyes of "Offred." She writes about abuse of power, the dead-end living, and the lack of freedoms we take so for granted in the USA. I find the book disturbing as I wonder if such a totalitarian society could emerge in the USA. She creates a cult perhaps, not a Christian society as I understand Jesus.



**SALLIE:** What a bizarre world she created. I hope this couldn't really happen. What they did with the children tore me apart. Allred's daughter, torn from her mother's arms? And the girl children raised to breed? This is not a good society. I did not like the "dystopia." A terrible way to create a society. Have there been many societies like this?



**ABIGAIL:** To me, this book makes sense. I get it. The extremes of religion have nothing to do with God. It's a work of art about the corruption of power, playing games with people. Of course the fact that they kill the Quakers, turned me against them from the get go. Who can take issue with Quakers? But within a totalitarian culture, someone who listens to the quiet voice within and refuses to take up arms? That's extremely threatening. So I can see what's she saying. Good job, Margaret Atwood.



**MOLLY:** Why did you choose this book, Katherine? Really? It reminds me of slavery. The ways Gilead had of controlling people.? I'd really like to ask Margaret why she wrote this book. I guess she must have been making a statement about control and repression. But I found it so disturbing and difficult to read. I prefer not to read books like this.



**PRISCILLA:** I did not enjoy this book. I agree with Nancy. It was a cult, not a Christian book. The way they treated the handmaid's? That's not according to the gospel? And in general, there wasn't much love here. Not good, ladies.



**KATHARINE:** I chose this book because I think we need to think about what could happen if we abandon democracy, if our leaders take control. To me, she's written quite an interesting book here that shows what might happen in a totalitarian society. It's a classic. It's been popular for over 30 years, and now the series came out. I thought it would be good to look at this.



**JANE:** I watched the Hulu series, instead of reading the book. This is so weird. Really taking women back into the dark ages, don't you think? I hope this can't happen, won't happen. Freaky. Scary. I thought we'd come a long way, ladies! Not in this book. Why do you think this series is so popular?