

Book Club Notes for *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* by Monique Roffey

Book Summary

In Monique Roffey's book, *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle*, George and Sabine Harwood arrive in Trinidad from England as young newlyweds, with just a couple of suitcases and Sabine's prized green bicycle. Their intention is to stay for not more than three years, but George falls in love with the island. Sabine, however, is ill at ease with the racial segregation and unrest in her new home, and takes solace in the freedom of her green bicycle.

George and Sabine become more entangled in their life on the island – in all its passion and betrayals – and Sabine's bicycle takes her places she wouldn't otherwise go. One day George makes a discovery that forces him to realise that extent of the secrets between them, and is seized by an urgent, desperate need to prove his love for her – with tragic consequences.

An unforgettable love story, brimming with passion and politics, set over fifty years in Trinidad – a place at times enchanting, and at times highly dangerous . . .

About the Author

Monique Roffey was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, and educated in the UK. Her highly acclaimed debut novel, *Sun Dog*, was published in 2002. Since then she has worked as a Centre Director for the Arvon foundation and has held the post of Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Sussex and Chichester universities. She currently lives in Harlesden, North London, where she spends most of the day in her pyjamas, writing.

Book Club Discussion Questions

1. When George and Sabine Harwood first arrive in Trinidad as young newlyweds, they never intend to stay beyond three years. George is instantly smitten with the island, but Sabine is never at one with her new home and believes Trinidad is cursed. What's at the heart of Sabine's uneasiness?
2. The novel opens with the savage beating of Talbot, Jennifer's son, up on Paramin hill, a lonely spot. They leave him badly hurt, thinking no one saw what happened. Roffey implies there *was a* witness to the attack – the hills themselves. Given the history of slavery and indenture, what importance does 'landscape as witness' have throughout the book?
3. In Sabine and George, Monique Roffey creates a striking, tender portrait of a marriage over time. It's a marriage marked by passion, tumultuousness and infidelities – but is there ever doubt about the strength of the couple's love?
4. It could be argued there are three large, spirited protagonists in this novel – George, Sabine and Trinidad itself. How does Roffey challenge our notions of the Caribbean?
5. When they arrive, George and Sabine are invited to a party at the Governor's residence. They go with Irit and John. Irit is scathing about this expat world and quickly gets into a dispute with Bonny about Eric Williams. What hypocrisies does Roffey portray in this expat world?

6. Sabine discovers the streets of the Port of Spain on her green bicycle. Does her bicycle offer her freedom, or simply make her more aware of the restrictions placed upon her?
7. After the gaining of independence Sabine starts to write letters to Eric Williams. Why?
8. Late in life, George gets a job as a feature writer for the *Trinidad Guardian*. He describes himself as a 'soft news man' who writes features and 'fluffy stuff'. After he discovers Sabine's letters to Eric Williams how does his attitude change to his journalistic work?
9. When Granny Seraphina first meets Sabine she is pleased to hear Sabine confess that Trinidad doesn't like her, and tells Sabine it's 'time for change'. Yet fifty years after independence Trinidad is beset by gang violence and teeters on the edge of dictatorship. Are Granny and her ideals – and the ideals of so many – betrayed?
10. George has a friendship with the little boy, Clock, who sings in the church choir. Given the tense relationship George has with his own son, Sebastian, and the fact that Clock has no father, how do these two relate to one another?
11. George and Sabine are great party hosts. They become famous for their parties at their new house beneath the green hills. Later, when things sour between them Sabine says 'Parties cured us'. What does she mean by this?
12. Granny Seraphina helps Sabine when she is confronted by a stone-throwing crowd during the black power riots. Why does she do this?
13. When George dies and Jennifer appears in tears, worried for her son's life, Sabine gets on her green bicycle and rides it to the local police station with a gun. In a fit of rage she shoots Bobby Comacho dead. In what way does this make Sabine 'part of things now' in Trinidad?
14. Sabine often talks to the hills surrounding her home. In them she sees George's real mistress and her main competition – and yet she is sad to leave the hills at the end of the book. Why?
15. *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* was inspired in part by Roffey's parents, and in part by the author's conflicting feelings for the vibrant, complicated country of her birth. How effective is fiction as a vehicle for telling family stories?