

# Reading Group Guide

## Readers Club Guide: The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo

This reading group guide for *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

### Introduction

Aging and reclusive Hollywood movie icon Evelyn Hugo is finally ready to tell the truth about her glamorous and scandalous life. But when she chooses unknown magazine reporter Monique Grant for the job, no one in the journalism community is more astounded than Monique herself. Why her? Why now?

Monique is not exactly on top of the world. Her husband, David, has left her, and her career has stagnated. Regardless of why Evelyn has chosen her to write her biography, Monique is determined to use this opportunity to jump-start her career.

Summoned to Evelyn's Upper East Side apartment, Monique listens as Evelyn unfurls her story: from making her way to Los Angeles in the 1950s to her decision to leave show business in the late '80s, and, of course, the seven husbands along the way. As Evelyn's life unfolds—revealing a ruthless ambition, an unexpected friendship, and a great forbidden love—Monique begins to feel a very real connection to the actress. But as Evelyn's story catches up with the present, it becomes clear that her life intersects with Monique's own in tragic and irreversible ways.

### Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. Each husband's section opens with an illustrative moniker (for example, "Poor Ernie Diaz," "Goddamn Don Adler," "Agreeable Robert Jamison"). Discuss the meaning and significance of some of these descriptions. How do they set the tone for the section that follows? Did you read these characterizations as coming from Evelyn, Monique, an omniscient narrator, or someone else?

2. Of the seven husbands, who was your favorite, and why? Who surprised you the most?

3. Monique notes that hearing Evelyn Hugo's life story has inspired her to carry herself differently than she would have before. In what ways does Monique grow over the course of the novel? Discuss whether Evelyn also changes by the end of her time with Monique, and if so, what spurs this evolution.

4. On page 147, Monique says, "I have to 'Evelyn Hugo' Evelyn Hugo." What does it mean to "Evelyn Hugo"? Can you think of a time when you might be tempted to "Evelyn Hugo"?

5. Did you trust Evelyn to be a reliable narrator as you were reading? Why, or why not? Did your opinion on this change at all by the conclusion, and if so, why?

6. What role do the news, tabloid, and blog articles interspersed throughout the book serve in the narrative? What, if anything, do we learn about Evelyn's relationship to the outside world from them?

7. At several points in the novel, such as pages 82–83 and 175–82, Evelyn tells her story through the second person, "you." How does this kind of narration affect the reading experience? Why do you think she chooses these memories to recount in this way?

8. How do you think Evelyn's understanding and awareness of sexuality were shaped by her relationship with Billy—the boy who works at the five-and-dime store? How does her sensibility evolve from this initial encounter? As she grows older, to what extent is Evelyn's attitude toward sex influenced by those around her?

9. On page 54, Evelyn uses the saying “all’s well that ends well” as part of her explanation for not regretting her actions. Do you think Evelyn truly believes this? Using examples from later in her life, discuss why or why not. How do you think this idea relates to the similar but more negatively associated phrase “the ends justify the means”?

10. Evelyn offers some firm words of wisdom throughout her recounting of her life, such as “Be wary of men with something to prove” (p. 77), “Never let anyone make you feel ordinary” (p. 208), and “It is OK to grovel for something you really want” (p. 192). What is your favorite piece of advice from Evelyn? Were there any assertions you strongly disagreed with?

11. Several times, Evelyn mentions having cosmetic surgery. What was your reaction to this? How do these decisions jibe with the value system and ethical code that she seems to live by? Why do you think Evelyn continues to dye her hair at the end of her life?

12. Review the scenes on pages 199 and 348, in which Evelyn relays memories of conversing in Spanish after years without speaking it. Discuss the role language plays in her understanding of who she is. In what ways does her relationship to her Cuban identity parallel her experiences with her sexuality, and in what ways does it differ?

13. If you could meet and interview one celebrity at the end of their...