# Bookclub Notes

## A memoir of a turbulent time – and a chess game that broke all the rules

**In 1989, two married women met by chance. They instantly hit it off, but little did they know that their new relationship would turn their lives upside-down.**

**This is the true story of that relationship, which threatened to cost them their children, families and friends and forced them to reassess their sexuality, identity and heritage. Along the way, one — an acclaimed biographer — was to explore the power of objects, while the other — a painter — was to follow her whakapapa back to the first Maori king, Te Wherowhero.**

**Against the odds, the couple's new life together became rich in laughter, travel, unusual encounters, investigations into Viking raids, the Kingitanga movement, the death of a New Zealand artist, chicken claws, ghosts, eccentrics and much more. A fascinating read on so many levels, this is an important view of our country from its very edge.**

### About the author

Joanne Drayton is an acclaimed New Zealand author. Her book Hudson & Halls: The Food of Love was the winner of the Royal Society Te Aparangi Award for General Non-Fiction at the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards in May 2019. Joanne's The Search for Anne Perry was a New York Times non-fiction bestseller, the subject of a 60 Minutes programme; and a cover story for the NZ Listener.

She has written many critically acclaimed biographies, curated exhibitions and publishes in art history, theory and biography. In 2007, she was awarded a National Library Fellowship, and in 2017 the prestigious Logan Fellowship at the Carey Institute in Upstate New York. Joanne is a research associate at the University of Auckland and an English teacher at Avondale College. She lives in Auckland, New Zealand, with her partner and three cats

## Author's note:

*I am captivated by objects. Especially by the idea that they tell their own stories, and that narratives are moulded and marked during their making. At my first biography conference, at King's College in London, I was asked how I would go about writing an autobiography. I said rather obtusely (it seems to me now), that I wanted to carve my story in lines incised on bone. I had already begun carving a response to the Lewis chess pieces, and I felt these objects were emblematic of my heritage. The more I worked on them, the more their story became interwoven with mine. The game of chess with its oppositional premise, strict hierarchy, rules, strategies, taboos—victories and losses—resonated with themes in my own life. Ultimately, carving these pieces was the inspiration for a written life-text, which would begin an all-consuming conversation between words and objects.*

## Questions:

1. *The Queen's Wife* is a compelling story of heartbreak, heritage and hope, which of these resonated the strongest with you?
2. How does the theme of the stories behind objects link the different aspects of the book?
3. The full story behind the Lewis chess set will probably never be known. Is the fictional retelling an effective way of conveying what might have happened, and do you think it fits within a nonfiction book?
4. How do you feel about New Zealand myth and material sitting alongside a distinctly international story?
5. What do you think the main challenges of writing an autobiography are? Do you feel you own your own story even when it intersects and sometimes clashes with the life-stories of others?
6. In *The Queen's Wife*, chess is a metaphor for what? How does it work and resonate through this story?
7. Humour is a feature of this book. Does it appeal to you? Does it hinder or enhance the narrative?
8. Jo and Sue fought a bitter custody battle. What would you have done in the same situation?
9. Did you identify with one person more than any other?
10. Consider the art work throughout the book. Does it help your understanding of the story?
11. Some things have changed in that Jo and Sue have now been able to marry: do you think their experiences of coming together would have been much different these days compared to thirty years ago?
12. Have you read *The Hare with Amber Eyes* by Edmund de Waal? Is this a very different book but in the same tradition?