

BOOK CLUB NEWS

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Still Life by Louise Penny

about Louise Penny



"I live outside a small village south of Montreal, quite close to the American border. My husband Michael and I have long had dogs, all golden retrievers. Bonnie, Maggie, Seamus, Trudy and now Bishop. Some came as puppies, some were adopted as adults. All beloved.

Michael and I were together for 22 years and married for 20. He was the inspiration for Armand Gamache. Kindly, thoughtful, generous, a man of courage and integrity, who both loved and accepted love.

He developed dementia, and died peacefully at home in September 2016, surrounded by the love he'd put into the world for his 83 years.

So now it's Bishop and me. But we're far from alone. We have the village, and all our friends including my Assistant Lise, and the indomitable, happy spirit of Michael. And, of course, the company of Armand, Clara, Ruth, Gabri and Olivier et al." Louise Penny from her [website](#).



Discussion Leader: Teri King

Teri began the discussion with "Who liked the book?" Several readers claimed *Still Life* either as a "favorite" or "appealing" (in spite of being a mystery novel); others appreciated the character development. Discuss the character of Armand Gamache as a homicide detective and compare him to other icons such as

Sherlock Holmes or Hercules Poirot. Who inspired the character of Armand Gamache? At the beginning of *Still Life*, we are told that “violent death still surprised Chief Inspector Armand Gamache.” Why is that odd for a homicide detective and how does it influence his work?

There are three main couples in the book: Clara and Peter, Olivier and Gabri, and Gamach and his wife Reine-Marie. How would you characterize each? How about the secondary relationships: Armand and Jean-Guy, Clara and Jane, Peter and Ben? Describe the relationship between Gamache and his colleagues. What role did each colleague play? Who killed Jane? Why? With which characters did you sympathize? What characters intrigued you? Whom did you suspect? Which characters seemed most real? Talk about the town as a character. What are the echoes of *Paradise in Three Pines*, and what role do snakes – real or metaphorical – play there? How does Louise Penny’s character development compare to, say, that of Agatha Christie’s? Did your perception of any characters change as the novel progressed? Did any characters change during the course of the novel? What are Gamache’s feelings toward the town?

What was Jane’s relationship with the townspeople? Discuss the town’s protection of Jane; of their tolerance towards her. What is the significance of Jane’s art? What role did it play? How do you envision her art? Comment on Louise Penny’s style. Where is the suspense? Peter, Clara and their son. Jane’s painting. Yolande. What is the significance of archery? What did you learn about archery? The blind? Discuss foreshadowing at the beginning of the book; what clue is there to the murderer? Where is the humor? Comment on the style. What connection is there between the setting and characters with Louise Penny’s life?



The go-around comments were overwhelmingly positive but not unanimous. "Enjoyed." "Not a mystery reader but enjoyed this." "Loved the character development." "Had six people on the suspect list." "Loved the discussion on archery – a red herring to distract us." "Charming." "Better mystery than most." "Appreciated the description: i.e., snow against the face." "Loved the book and hoped the author would gain some new fans by reading it in our book club." "Gentle murder mystery. A 'why who did it' rather than 'who dunnit.'" "The characters became like friends." "(Author) Penny has a newsletter. There are good people in the world." "The last two pages were evolutionary." "Appreciated the humor; i.e., Chef Boyardee." "Read a lot of mysteries and liked this one. Charming, delightful." "Appreciated the humor." "Glad you started with the first novel and looking forward to reading more." And finally, "bland; didn't read the (whole) book and was not convinced..."

Thank you, Teri, for your expert leadership of this large group discussion. Join us April 21, 2018, when we will discuss *The Three-Year Swim Club* by Julie Checkoway led by Don Markley. Happy reading!