



FRIENDS OF THE PALM SPRINGS LIBRARY BOOK CLUB

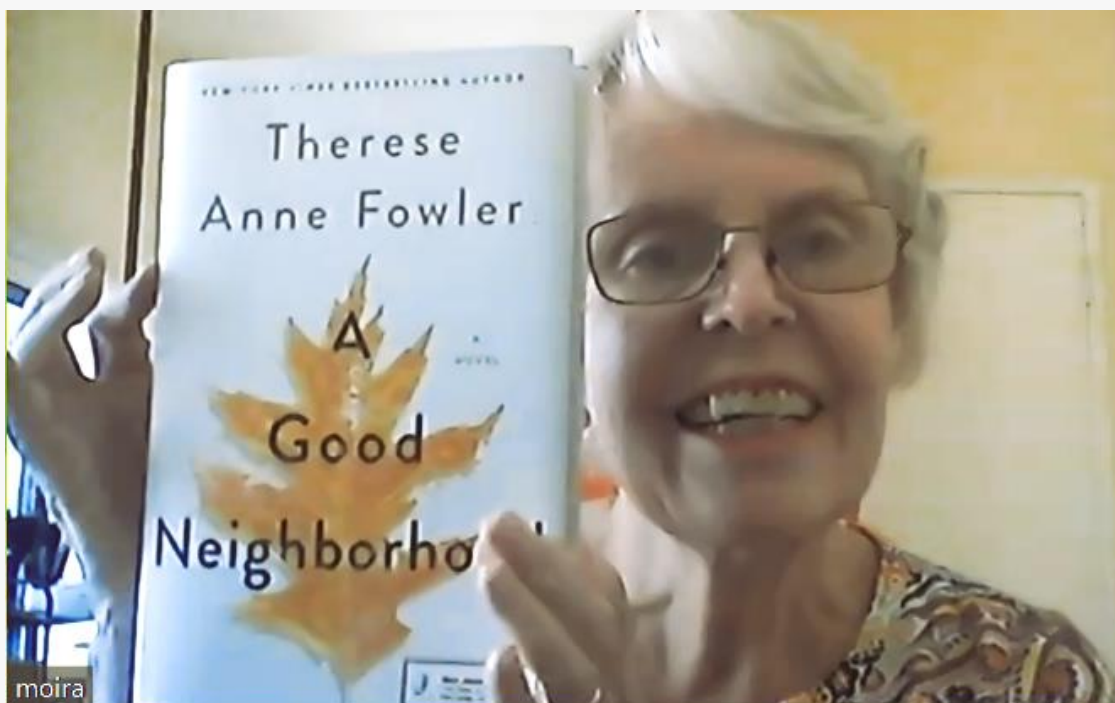
FOPSL Book Club: May 21, 2021

Book: *A Good Neighborhood*

Author: Therese Anne Fowler

Discussion leader: Moira Johannessen

Moira Leads Discussion of *A Good Neighborhood*



In May, Moira Johannessen presented *A Good Neighborhood* (2020) which is the sixth novel by Therese Anne Fowler. She is best known for her fourth novel, *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* (2013), which was adapted for a television series in 2017. Her husband is science fiction and fantasy author John Kessel.

The story is about conflict between next-door neighbors in an affluent neighborhood. The two families are from different backgrounds, particularly racial (one white, the other black). There are themes about power and control in the context of race and sex, and even the power of Mother Nature. The book cover has a leaf suggesting a tree is a central part of the story as it divides the property of the two neighbors.

In an interview with Bookreporter, (<https://youtu.be/PNzJAZHPDek>), March 24, 2020), the author discussed using the outside narrator of “the neighborhood.” She described her novel as a “classic tragedy” in that the reader would easily know how it would end. Giving “the neighborhood” a voice provides “the intimacy of first person” narrative and explains the “why?” in the story. She admitted the device is rarely used, and some of our book club members would have preferred that.

Earlier this season, the book club read *American Dirt*, a novel about Mexican asylum-seekers migrating to the U.S. written by a non-Mexican, white woman. Ms. Fowler was aware her novel would receive similar criticism since she is a white woman writing about black characters, and she addressed this issue in a note in the beginning of the book. In an interview with Moms Don't Have Time to Read (<https://zibbyowens.com/transcript/thereseannefowler>), Ms. Fowler said, “I wanted to make sure that I followed the advice that I got from Zadie Smith [an acclaimed black author], which was to write about whatever you want about, but just make sure you do your homework.” She acknowledges she read a pre-publication copy of *American Dirt* and didn't see any problems with it, however, “It's because we're not Mexican, or Mexican American. We can't see. We can't know what we don't know. I think we have to respect the opinions of people who do know and get those opinions early if we can so that we don't end up with a book that causes this complete utter, I think outsized, controversy.”

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Friends of the Palm Springs Library Book Club meets online

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