

Discussion Guide: The Jewel and the Key

A.

The novel is structured around two separate but connected time periods that mirror each other. What are the similarities between the two times that emerge as the story develops? What kind of cognitive dissonances does Addie experience in Reg's time?

B.

If Reg (or Meg or Emma Mae) were to travel forward to Addie's time, what would he find impressive? Depressive? Laughable? (For example: It would be impossible to Reg to think of his war as World War One. To him and everyone else at the time it was "The Great War". How do you think he might react to discovering that only about twenty one years later, the world entered into another World War?)

C.

Addie is driven throughout the book to "help" Whaley, who seems to have a rare ability to sabotage himself. She starts out by really meddling but eventually backs off a bit, though she still is trying desperately to create circumstances that will benefit him. To what degree do you feel she's manipulating him? To what degree is she acting for his own good? Is either of these approaches justified or is it a denial of a friend's free agency to get this involved?

D.

How does the theater operate within the story? In what ways is it a microcosm of the conflicts going on in the larger world outside of it? How do the content of the plays being performed at the Jewel comment the concerns, hopes and fears of Addie, Reg and even Whaley?