

READER'S GUIDE

BOOK OF MERCY:

A Funny Novel about a Serious Issue—Censorship

1. Censorship in a small North Carolina town is the topic of *Book of Mercy*. The American Library Association reports that about 500 books are challenged every year in the United States. What do you think about book banning—when is it okay or is it never okay? What would you do if it happened in your community?
2. While the action revolves around book banning, the theme of *Book of Mercy* really concerns parenting and the lengths parents will go to protect their children. Describe the various types of parents in this book. Even Ryder is a parent of sorts. Are there good parents and bad parents in *Mercy*?
3. Sherry Roberts intentionally avoids giving you a lot of character stats (hair color, eye color, height). Instead, she wants you to associate an action or emotion with a character. How do you feel about this? Do you have a picture in your mind of Sam the husband, Cody the sheriff, or the Professor without knowing all their vital statistics?
4. *Mercy* is full of critters. What bird appears twice in the book? What does it symbolize and who does it comfort? What insect is important and why? What do the deer and Ryder have in common?
5. One of the author's first ideas about this book was a woman who cannot read and yet fights for the things that have made her life miserable: books. Antigone Brown is dyslexic. Do you have experience with dyslexia? Was Antigone's fears about her dyslexia justified? Why or why not?
6. A book club is the villain in this book. We often think of such groups as protecting literature, but they also can be power centers. How did you feel about the use of a book club in this book? Were the members of the club and their actions believable?
7. Not only are there different types of parents in *Mercy*, but there are different types of relationships. Describe your favorite relationship and why it stayed with you after you closed the book. Were the different marriages realistic to you and why?

8. Most censors object to books because of sex, violence, swearing, and perhaps the most nebulous and worse excuse of all: “to protect the children.” The author used actual challenged books and the actual reasons for challenging as part of the story (yes, sometimes you can’t make up this stuff). Look at the books Irene found objectionable. Do you find them objectionable? Why or why not?
9. Antigone is named for a girl in Greek mythology who incurred the wrath of a king when she cremated one of her brothers who was slain in battle. King Creon had denied the brother a proper burial because he had rebelled against his own city. Thus, Antigone came to symbolize someone who opposes authority for the sake of the rights of the individual. How is Antigone Brown like that mythical woman? What does she do that she never dreamed of doing for the sake of her “children”?
10. Some reviewers have noted that this would be a good book for young adults. What role do the children play in this story? Are all the children believable? Do you think Star is psychic? What is Ryder searching for?

About the Author: In addition to *Book of Mercy*, Sherry Roberts is the author of a novel about art and creativity called *Maud’s House* (Papier-Mache Press, California) and two nonfiction books on the city of Greensboro, North Carolina. She has contributed essays and articles to national publications such as *USA Today*. Her short fiction has been published in newspapers, literary magazines, and *O. Henry Literary Festival Short Stories*. After years as a newspaper reporter and magazine editor, she started her own company with her husband, The Roberts Group Editorial & Design (www.editorialservice.com), to provide editorial services and Web development to businesses and book publishers. She lives in Apple Valley, Minnesota.

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Details: Available in paperback and eBook through www.osmyrrahpublishing.com & www.Amazon.com

ISBN: 978-0-9638880-4-4; 242 pages; Fiction/Contemporary Women/ Humor/Relationships
Publication date: September 2011

For more information: www.osmyrrahpublishing.com

To read an excerpt of *Book of Mercy*: www.Amazon.com

Sherry would love to meet with your book group. She is available to visit book clubs in the Twin Cities area in person. She also is happy to chat with your group by phone. To arrange a visit, e-mail her at sherry@sherry-roberts.com.