



Book Club Set

The Forgotten Home Child

By Genevieve Graham

About the Author

Genevieve Graham is the *USA TODAY* and #1 bestselling author of *The Forgotten Home Child*, *Letters Across the Sea*, *Tides of Honour*, *Promises to Keep*, *Come from Away*, and *At the Mountain's Edge*. Her latest novel, *Bluebird*, became a national instant bestseller upon its release in April 2022. She is passionate about breathing life back into Canadian history through tales of love and adventure. She lives near Edmonton, Alberta. Visit her at GenevieveGraham.com or on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @GenGrahamAuthor.

Authors note:

"Thanks for coming to see me.

I'm a tremendously lucky lady. I have a wonderful, loving family, a beautiful home, AND I get to write. Really, I can't imagine a better life.

Decades ago (!) I went to university to be a professional oboe player. I never planned to be a writer. I never even tried to write a story until I was over forty – which is proof that you're never too old to try something new.

My passion is breathing life back into history one story at a time, and I focus on Canadian History. When you finish one of my books, I hope you will be able to say you've learned something about history, but I also hope you can say the book moved you to learn more. And I will keep bringing you more, because I love what I do!"

About the Book

The Home for Unwanted Girls meets Orphan Train in this unforgettable novel about a young girl caught in a scheme to rid England's streets of destitute children, and the lengths she will go to find her way home—based on the true story of the British Home Children.

2018

At ninety-seven years old, Winnifred Ellis knows she doesn't have much time left, and it is almost a relief to realize that once she is gone, the truth about her shameful past will die with her. But when her great-grandson Jamie, the spitting image of her dear late husband, asks about his family tree, Winnifred can't lie any longer, even if it means breaking a promise she made so long ago...

1936

Fifteen-year-old Winny has never known a real home. After running away from an abusive stepfather, she falls in with Mary, Jack, and their ragtag group of friends roaming the streets of Liverpool. When the children are caught stealing food, Winny and Mary are left in Dr. Barnardo's Barkingside Home for Girls, a local home for orphans and forgotten children found in the city's slums. At Barkingside, Winny learns she will soon join other boys and girls in a faraway place called Canada, where families and better lives await them.

But Winny's hopes are dashed when she is separated from her friends and sent to live with a family that has no use for another daughter. Instead, they have paid for an indentured servant to work on their farm. Faced with this harsh new reality, Winny clings to the belief that she will someday find her friends again.

Inspired by true events, *The Forgotten Home Child* is a moving and heartbreaking novel about place, belonging, and family—the one we make for ourselves and its enduring power to draw us home.

Retrieved from: <https://genevevegraham.com/books/the-forgotten-home-child/>

Discussion Questions



1. Did you know who the British Home Children were before reading this book? How does this chapter in history shape your understanding of Canada as a British colony and as its own nation?
2. Winny's family moves from Ireland to England for a better life, but they experience tragedy, poverty, and hunger. Compare and contrast her early life with Mary and Jack's, and discuss the different events that drove them to the streets along with so many other children. What might this say about the economic reality of England at this time?
3. In the present-day storyline, Winny says that Dr. Barnardo "was a well-intentioned man with a good heart." After reading this book, what do you think of Dr. Barnardo and his Homes, and later, his plan to send children to Canada? Was there any merit to his actions? Where did his plan go wrong? And why?
4. Winny and her friends were told that Canada was a land of opportunity and that there were families waiting to take them in as their own, but in most cases, this was far from the truth. Why do you think there was so much hostility toward the Home Children? Do you think Canada is more welcoming to newcomers now? What prejudices still exist today?
5. Canada was a country struggling through the Great Depression and on the brink of another world war. Did knowing this historical backdrop change how you saw the actions of Mistress Adams and Mistress Renfrew? In what other ways does the author complicate our view of these families and even elicit our sympathies?
6. When Winny arrives on the Adams farm, she finds solace in picturing the faces of her friends. Discuss the importance of remembrance in the novel. What are some other key scenes where Winny or Jack remember their friends? How does this act evolve throughout the novel? For instance, when is it healing? And when is it too painful?
7. Mary and Winny are closer than friends; they see each other as sisters, and Winny goes on to adopt Mary's son, Billy, as her own. Consider the theme of family in the novel. What other close ties beyond blood relations do we see? What do these portrayals say about the value of family and belonging?

8. Both Mary and Quinn die as a result of their mistreatment. In the author's note to readers, she shares that Mary's and Quinn's experiences were not uncommon. How did learning this change your understanding of this history?
9. The Home Children make their own trunks at Barnardo's Homes to bring to Canada. Winny keeps hers for her entire life, but Jack abandons his. Beyond being luggage, what is the role of the trunks in the novel? What do they come to symbolize?
10. Why does Jack connect with the messages in *The Communist Manifesto*? How does this reference contextualize Jack's personal story within a larger socioeconomic lens?
11. Winny often says that the loneliness was the worst part of her experience. How does her past continue to isolate her from those she loves in her later years? How does seeing the British Home Children memorial in the Park Lawn Cemetery change that? What might this tell us about the importance of historical commemoration?
12. When Winny goes to adopt Billy at the maternity home, the matron recommends not telling Billy that he is adopted. Discuss the portrayal of adoption by comparing and contrasting Charlotte's and Billy's experiences.
13. At their graduation from nursing school, Winny and Charlotte are called "the future of Canada." When war breaks out, Jack, Edward, and Cecil enlist to fight for Canada. How were the Home Children fundamental to Canada's growth and nationhood? How does their mistreatment complicate their sense of identity?
14. In what ways did the war change Jack's life when he returned to Canada? Consider the novel's references to communism. Do you think Jack achieved the equal and fair treatment that he sought while reading *The Communist Manifesto*? Why was Jack still unhappy?
15. Winny tells Jack that she feels like home when she's with him. Discuss the meaning of home in the novel. What does the word come to symbolize?
16. Winny and Jack carry the shame of being a Home Child for their entire life. How did their experiences affect their ability to love, trust, develop relationships, and lead normal lives? How did their trauma affect them differently? Discuss the lingering effects on their own family.

17. Why does Winny open up about her past after so long? How does sharing her experiences help Chrissie work through her own grief and bring Winny, Chrissie, and Jamie closer together?
18. Throughout the novel, many characters wish to know more about their family history, including Billy, Chrissie, and Jamie. How are their motivations the same? How are they different? Why is knowing their personal history so important to their sense of self and family?
19. Discuss the theme of forgiveness in the novel. In your opinion, do Mistress Adams and Mistress Renfrew do enough to atone for their actions? Should Winny's family forgive her for keeping secrets? Do you think it's possible to forgive a wrong even if it is never forgotten?
20. Consider the dual timeline structure of the novel. How does this reflect the experience of the Home Children?
21. Discuss the significance of the title *The Forgotten Home Child*.

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Other Links and Resources



Historical Information: <https://genevievegraham.com/about-the-author/>

Other recommended reads: <https://genevievegraham.com/recommended-reads/>

Deleted scenes: some of this was included in the eventual book, some was not.

- Entering the Orphanage <https://genevievegraham.com/entering-the-orphanage/>
- Inadvertent Abandonment <https://genevievegraham.com/inadvertent-abandonment/>

Share your thoughts with other readers!

DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: