

# ON THE ROOFTOP

A Novel

MARGARET WILKERSON SEXTON

## – READING GROUP GUIDE –

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

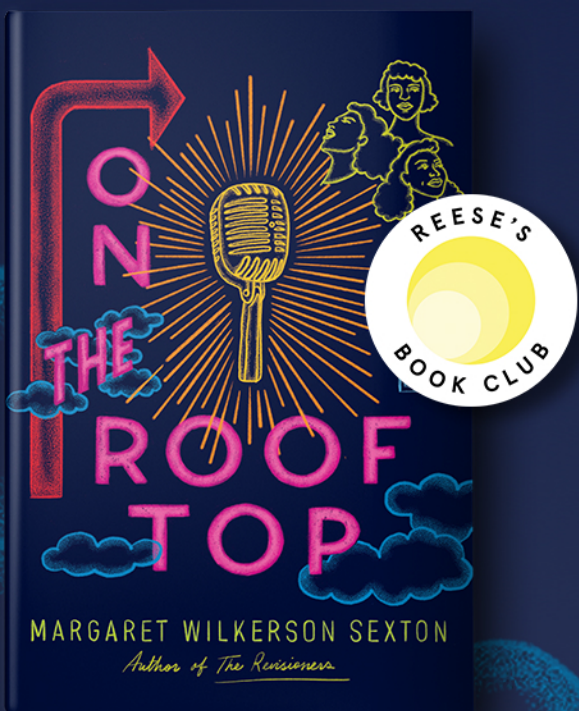
1. *On the Rooftop* uses church hymns and songs throughout the novel in various ways. All of them have special and spiritual meanings for the characters. Are there any songs that are special to you? What makes them powerful?

2. How would you describe the relationship between the three sisters—Esther, Ruth, and Chloe—in your own words?

3. There are many different kinds of love displayed in *On the Rooftop*, from familial to romantic to communal. What type do you think is most important and why?

4. On page 75, Mr. Franklin says to Vivian, “There’s two different types of people in the world . . . two types only: people who know how to call up a desire, and command it into stone, and people who don’t.” What do you think he means by this? Do you agree with him?

5. Ruth is the first sister to stray from the family’s plan of being star singers; she has a baby with her husband. Have you ever had a life event take you somewhere completely unexpected? If you had the chance, would you do things differently?







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6. Each sister has her own unique dream, and, more importantly, so does their mother. Do you think dreams should only be about your own desires or should they take the wishes of others into account? Why or why not?

7. Vivian dreams of success for her daughters and wants them to have a better life than she did, but ultimately, all of them have different priorities. What do you think defines being successful? Do you think each of the girls finds success at the end?

8. One of the major themes of the novel is learning how to adapt to the changes of a rapidly moving society, even when some of those changes are not positive. Music, food, faith, and family are the constant tools that the characters utilize to make this new world work. What tools or rituals do you have in your life to help you with change?

9. Towards the end of the novel, on page 269, Freddy says, “Now I see we can’t escape forward movement. It’s coming. Even if we don’t bend to it, it’s here.” How would you describe each character’s reaction to the future that is unfolding?

10. Throughout the book, the Fillmore neighborhood is being impacted by gentrification and targeted by unfair city planning, and as a result, an entire population of people must leave their community for good. How do you think the experience of losing their family home affects each of the family members? What do you think the lives of Vivian and the sisters would have been like a year later if they were able to stay in San Francisco?