

good woman

A Reckoning



savala
nolan

Discussion Guide



Dear Book Club Readers,

I'm overjoyed to share *Good Woman: A Reckoning* with you! A book is a long conversation, first between a writer and her ideas, then a writer and an editor, then a writer and her readers—and, in the case of book clubs, between readers themselves. If an author is very lucky, she gets to participate in this last part through book clubs and discussion guides. I am lucky, indeed.

Should we be good women, or something else? In our culture, “good” women are nice, helpful, selfless, deferential, and quiet. Good women keep the peace and take care of others. Bad women, on the other hand, are different. Bad women don't acquiesce to conventional wisdom. They question. They speak up. They refuse, unless they want to say yes. Bad women rest when they are tired, quit when they are through, and center themselves. They bring their entire selves to their lives and experience the full range of human emotions—even the forbidden ones, like hunger and fury—because they are free and they are whole.

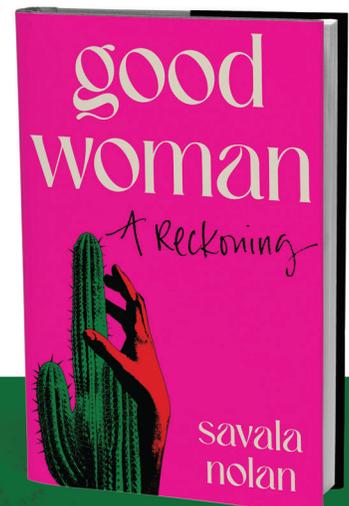
That's the kind of life I wish I'd built for myself from the jump: free and whole. But because I was raised to be good, I didn't know I could. It's also the kind of life I wish for all girls and women. That wish for our wholeness and freedom animates every word of *Good Woman*. That wish is the page on which everything else is written.

I hope you see possibilities and truth in this book's 12 essays. I hope *Good Woman* is a mirror, reflecting yourself back to you in healing and validating ways, and also a window, showing you things you haven't seen before, opening you to something new. I hope you love this book and underline and write in the margins and tell your girlfriends and your mom and your sister (and your dad and husband and brother) to read it, too. More than anything, though, I hope *Good Woman* energizes you and moves you to build a life where your wholeness and freedom are unmatched.

The questions in this reader's guide are meant to help you do just that, in community with fellow travelers.

With love,

Savala Nolan



BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE -

good woman

A Reckoning

1. What drew you to this book? The title? The image on the cover? The description?
2. Nolan says the socialization to be “good” starts when women are young girls. What’s an early memory of being told to be “good” in some way? This might mean being told to be quiet, to look a certain way, to do what you were supposed to do even when you didn’t want to, to protect someone else’s feelings, etc.
3. *Good Woman* covers a variety of topics: dieting, spirituality and religion, sex, motherhood, art, law, making and spending money, assault and violence, and imagination. Which of these topics interested you most when you picked up the book? Did your interest levels in these topics shift after reading it?
4. Share a passage that struck you as significant—or profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, funny, or sad. What makes it memorable for you?
5. In “Lest We Die of Hunger,” Nolan says that it’s important for women to honor their appetites in order to live full lives. What’s your relationship to your appetite? For food, and for other things. Do you tend to listen to your hunger or to control, silence, or ignore it?
6. In “The Made World,” readers are invited to imagine the fantasy of destroying the world “made for men” and creating one made for women. Nolan describes this process as intentionally unfair. What do you make of the idea that the world “made for men” should be scrapped and that embracing unfairness could be a necessary correction?
7. In “Mothers Superior,” Nolan writes that the physical, mental, and emotional labor of motherhood created a breakthrough in her relationship with spirituality, God, and the divine. Were you raised to see God as male? In your experience, does motherhood, as Nolan suggests, provide a better template for understanding God than fatherhood?
8. In “Good Advice,” Nolan says we should abandon culturally-inherited definitions of sex and create our own. How were you taught to define sex? Has your definition of sex changed over the years? What might be missing from it now?
9. In “Witness,” Nolan recounts her journey to Virginia to account for her family’s connection to slavery. How does this essay relate to the theme of women breaking free from social conditioning? Have you chosen to bear witness to difficult aspects of your personal, familial, or cultural history? Why or why not?
10. What woman in your life would benefit from the ideas in this book? How would you explain why you’re sharing this book and its ideas with her? What about a man in your life?
11. What concept or essay in this book triggered the most resistance or disagreement with you?
12. Did you learn any factual information from reading *Good Woman* that you didn’t know before? Did you Google anything while reading?
13. Re-read the first sentence. Why do you think the author chose to start the book this way? And what about the last sentence—why do you think the author chose to close the book with this statement?
14. If you were going to pick a single essay from *Good Woman* to expand into a full book, which would it be?
15. If you got the chance to ask the author one question, what would it be?

