book discussion kits

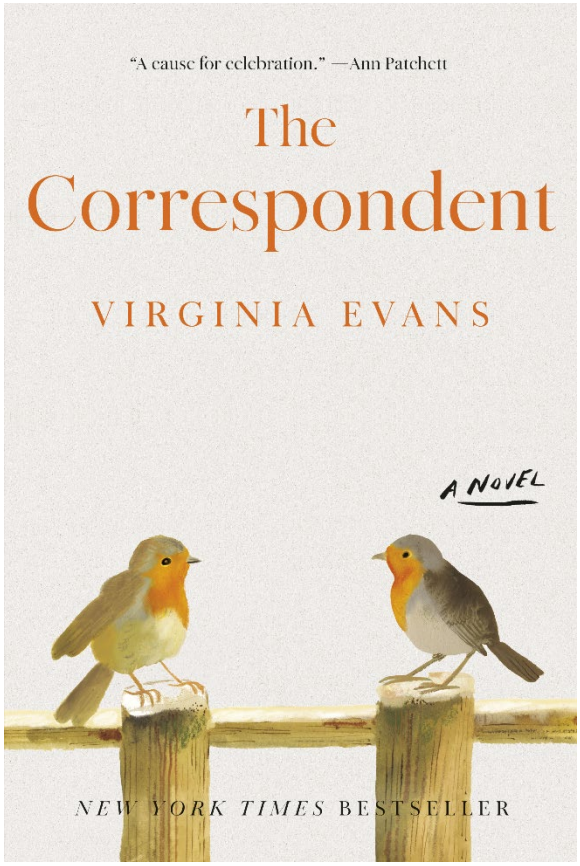
The Correspondent by Virginia Evans

Martin County Library System Book Discussion Kit:

The Correspondent by Virginia Evans

Included in the Kit:

- Book summary
- Author biography
- Discussion questions
- Recipe suggestions



Book summary

Sybil Van Antwerp has throughout her life used letters to make sense of the world and her place in it. Most mornings, around half past ten, Sybil sits down to write letters—to her brother, to her best friend, to the president of the university who will not allow her to audit a class she desperately wants to take, to Joan Didion and Larry McMurtry to tell them what she thinks of their latest books, and to one person to whom she writes often yet never sends the letter.

Sybil expects her world to go on as it always has—a mother, grandmother, wife, divorcee, distinguished lawyer, she has lived a very full life. But when letters from someone in her past force her to examine one of the most painful periods of her life, she realizes that the letter she has been writing over the years needs to be read and that she cannot move forward until she finds it in her heart to offer forgiveness.

Sybil Van Antwerp's life of letters might be "a very small thing," but she also might be one of the most memorable characters you will ever read.

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The Correspondent
by Virginia Evans

(Source: https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/755600/the-correspondent-by-virginia-evans/)

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Meet the Author

Virginia Evans is from the east coast of the United States. She attended James Madison University for her bachelor's in English literature, as well as Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, for her master's of philosophy in creative writing. Now she lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, with her husband, two children, and her Red Labrador, Brigid.

(Source: https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/2302714/virginia-evans/)



Photo: © Austin Joffe

Discussion Questions

1. "But the worst dream, the one that repeats, is that I sit down at the desk to write and there is the stack of letter writing paper, there are my pens, there are the envelopes, and I'm pawing at them like a cat, but I cannot pick them up. . . . I can't write." Sybil states this early on in the narrative, about the dreams she is having as she deals with going blind. What did this tell you about her character early on?
2. Sybil is not only a fanatic for the art of letter writing but she holds classic forms of communication in high regard (she tells James that she still reads the newspaper "in print, adequately edited, without the muck of advertisements blinking away"). What value do you see in these older forms of communicating? Are there things you wish were still mainstream that have been replaced by modern tech?

3. Sybil often remarks in her letters that they are follow-ups to phone calls or in lieu of calls so that she can compose her thoughts. What, do you find, are the benefits of writing out thoughts instead of a call? How do you think it helps Sybil to deal with the strained relationships in her life?
4. Sybil doesn't just communicate with her contemporaries but younger people as well, like Harry and the high school student writing a paper on her. How did you notice her tone shift when addressing these characters of various ages? How does Sybil paint a different picture of herself with different people? Which one is the "true" Sybil, if any?
5. Sybil writes to Joan Didion and Ann Patchett, among others. Which authors would you send letters to, whose work has impacted you the most?
6. During one of her letters to Harry, in answer to his question about her history, she briefly tells him and ends with "now that's me breezing over something like 30 years of day-in-day-out work." If you had to distill your professional history into a few sentences, what would you say?
7. Did you have any theories about who the unsent pages throughout the novel were intended for?
8. Sybil ends up in quite a love triangle. Between Theodore and Mick, who were you rooting for, if any, for her to wind up with?
9. Were you shocked at Rosalie's "betrayal" with Sybil's daughter? Did you see it as a betrayal, as Sybil calls it?
10. When Sybil reveals the truth about Gilbert's death, how did this shift your understanding of her?

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(*Source:*https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/755600/the-correspondent-by-virginia-evans/readers-guide/)

Recipes

Maryland Crab Cakes

Ingredients:



- 1 pound crabmeat
- 2 slices white bread, crusts trimmed
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1 tablespoon Old Bay Seasoning TM
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon Dijon-style prepared mustard
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons butter

Directions:

Place crab meat in a large bowl and remove any remaining shell pieces.

Break bread into small pieces and add to crab meat. Add beaten egg, Old Bay seasoning, mayonnaise, mustard, and Worcestershire sauce to the bowl. Mix by hand to avoid overworking crab meat; you want to keep the lumps of meat as much as possible.

Form into 6 patties.

Heat butter in a skillet over medium heat.

Fry patties in hot butter until golden brown, about 4 minutes per side.

(Source: https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/17771/maryland-crab-cakes-i/)

Recipes Continuation

Strawberry Streusel Cake

Ingredients:



Cake Batter

- 1/3 cup (75g) butter , room temperature
- 1/3 cup (70g) sugar
- 3 eggs
- 3 tbsp (45g) sour cream
- 1 tsp (5g) vanilla extract
- 2 tsp (8g) baking powder
- 1 ¼ cup (160g) flour
- 1/4 tsp (1g) salt

Strawberry Filling

- 10 oz (300g) fresh strawberries
- 2 tbsp (30g) sugar
- 1 tbsp (8g) cornstarch
- Zest from a lemon

Streusel Topping

- 2/3 cup (85g) all-purpose flour
- Pinch of salt
- 1/4 cup (56g) butter , room temperature
- 1/4 cup (50g) brown sugar
- 1/4 tsp (1g) ground cinnamon

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350F (180C). Grease an 8 inch (20cm) pan and line with parchment paper.

Prepare the streusel topping.

In a medium bowl, combine brown sugar with all-purpose flour, salt and cinnamon. Whisk to combine, then add softened butter with a fork until the mixture feels crumbly. Set the streusel aside until all the other ingredients are prepared.

Prepare the strawberry filling.

Cut strawberries into small pieces and place into a bowl. Add sugar, lemon zest and cornstarch and toss to coat. Set aside until you prepare the cake batter.

Prepare the cake batter.

In a medium bowl whisk the flour with baking powder and salt. Set aside until ready to use.

In a large mixing bowl add butter and sugar and mix to combine. Incorporate eggs one at a time. Add sour cream and vanilla extract and mix to combine.

Gradually incorporate the flour mixture.

Pour batter into prepared pan. Spread strawberry filling and top with streusel topping.

Bake for about 40 minutes until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. If the streusel is browning too quickly cover with aluminum foil and continue baking.

Let cool on a cooling rack for at least 20 minutes before serving.

Dust with powdered sugar if desired. Enjoy!

(Source: https://www.homecookingadventure.com/strawberry-streusel-cake/)