



Museum of Extraordinary Things by Alice Hoffman

Martin County Library System Book Club Kit:

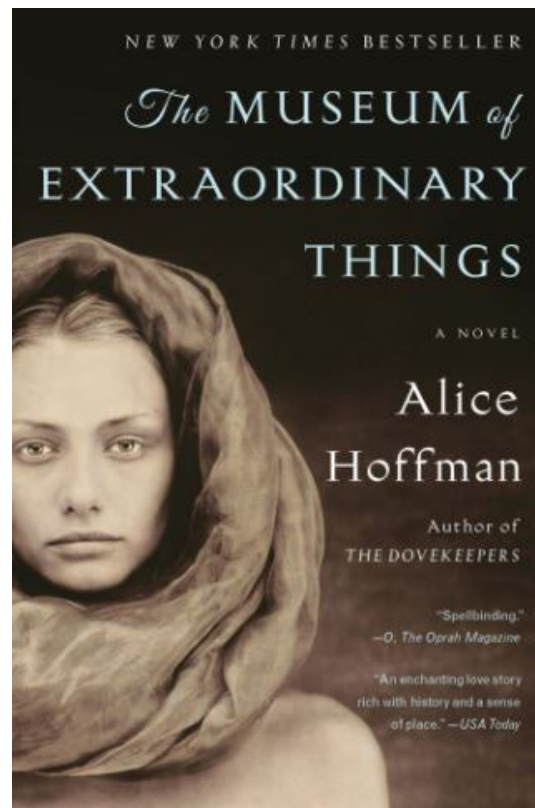
Museum of Extraordinary Things by Alice Hoffman

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Book summary

Coralie Sardie grows up in her father's "museum" on the Coney Island boardwalk where she appears as a living mermaid. Nightly swims in the Hudson River provide her only escape from her father's influence. One night, she encounters a handsome photographer named Eddie Cohen, a Russian immigrant who has turned his back on his Orthodox community. When Eddie photographs the devastating Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, he is drawn into the mystery of a factory worker's disappearance, and back to the Lower East side neighborhood he had abandoned. Set against the colorful, volatile world of early-twentieth-century New York City, Alice



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Hoffman's latest novel is a love story as strange and fantastic as anything *The Museum of Extraordinary Things* holds.

Source: Simon and Schuster

(simonandschuster.com/books/The-Museum-of-Extraordinary-Things/Alice-Hoffman/9781451693577)

Meet the Author

Alice Hoffman is the author of more than thirty works of fiction, including *Magic Lessons: The Prequel to Practical Magic*, *The World That We Knew*, *The Rules of Magic*, *The Marriage of Opposites*, *Practical Magic*, *The Book of Magic*, *The Red Garden*, the Oprah's Book Club selection *Here on Earth*, *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*, and *The Dovekeepers*. She lives near Boston.

Alice Hoffman was born in New York City on March 16, 1952, and grew up on Long Island. After graduating from high school in 1969, she attended Adelphi University, from which she received a BA, and then received a Mirrelles Fellowship to the Stanford University Creative Writing Center, which she attended in 1973 and 74, receiving an MA in creative writing. She currently lives in Boston.



Source: Author's website. (alicehoffman.com/about)



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Discussion Questions

1. The novel is framed by two spectacular fires. Why do you think the author chose to structure the novel this way? What effect does each fire have on the major characters and on the people of Manhattan and Brooklyn?
2. How does Raymond Morris, known as the Wolfman, change Coralie's perception of her father and their circumscribed world? What parallels does Coralie find between her own life and those of the characters in *Jane Eyre*?
3. Why does Coralie keep Maureen in the dark about her night swims and her father's sexual exploitation? Would Maureen have been able to protect Coralie if she had known?
4. Eddie says "the past was what we carried with us, threaded to the future, and we decided whether to keep it close or let it go" (139). Was Eddie able to let his past go? Did you sympathize with his decision to move away from his father?
5. Why does Eddie feel compelled to solve the mystery of Hannah Weiss's disappearance? What makes him a good "finder"?
6. When Coralie steps into the lion's cage, the trainer Bonavita tells her "you have a form of bravery inside you" (196). Do you agree? Does Coralie agree? In what instances does she defy her father, and when does she acquiesce to his demands?
7. Consider Coralie's claim that "curiosity had always been my downfall" (253). Did her curiosity about her father and the outside world worsen her situation or improve it? How naïve is Coralie?
8. What did you make of the living wonders at *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*? How did their treatment differ at Dreamland? What enables some of the wonders, such as the Butterfly Girl, to achieve a semblance of a normal life?
9. What sort of atmosphere does Alice Hoffman create by using dreams as a recurring motif? How do Coralie's and Eddie's dreams expose their inner lives and connect them to the past and future?



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10. Professor Sardie and Abraham Hochman both present themselves as things they are not. How did you feel about their deception and self-aggrandizement? Do circumstances make one worse than the other? In what ways did the culture of early-twentieth-century New York City favor the corrupt and those who bent the rules?
11. Where, and to whom, did Eddie look “to find what [he] was missing” (327)? What did Moses Levy, Abraham Hochman, the hermit, and Mr. Weiss each have to teach him?
12. Why did Maureen choose to stay with the Professor and Coralie, in spite of his treatment of her? Of the lessons that Maureen taught Coralie, which were the most important?
13. Consider the role that animals play in the novel. Why does Coralie save the tortoise? What is the symbolism of the trout that Eddie cannot kill? In what other instances do animals reveal something about a character?
14. In thinking of her father, Coralie says “perhaps there is evil in certain people, a streak of meanness that cannot be erased by circumstance or fashioned into something brand new by love” (246). Do you think a person can be innately evil? Are the morally ambiguous actions of other characters, such as Eddie or the liveryman, redeemed?
15. Hoffman’s portrait of New York City is of a rapidly evolving, volatile place. Which historical details stood out most vividly to you? If you’ve spent time in New York, was it hard to imagine the city as it was in the early-twentieth-century? What places are currently undergoing similar transformations or experiencing similar tensions?

Source: Simon and Schuster

(simonandschuster.com/books/The-Museum-of-Extraordinary-Things/Alice-Hoffman/9781451693577)

Recipes

Funnel Cake Bites

- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 1/4 cups whole milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 4 cups vegetable oil, or enough to fill 2 to 3 inches of the pot
- Powdered sugar, for garnish



Beat the eggs and sugar in a large bowl until foamy and pale yellow, approximately 2 minutes. Whisk in the whole milk and vanilla extract to the egg mixture.

Sift together the flour, baking powder and salt in a separate medium bowl. Gradually add the sifted dry ingredients into the wet mixture until there are no lumps or pockets of dry ingredients; be careful not to overmix. Fill a heavy-bottomed pot with approximately 2 to 3 inches of oil (no more than halfway up the pot) and heat the oil to 375 F over medium-high heat.

Using a cookie scoop, fill about 1/3 of the scoop with batter. If you fill it with too much batter, it will not fry well and will be raw in the center. Carefully add the batter to the oil. Cook until golden brown, about 2 to 3 minutes. Flip about half-way through, frying to make sure both sides are golden brown. Remove the funnel cake bites out of the oil with a slotted spoon or spider and onto a paper-towel-lined plate. Dust with powdered sugar and serve immediately.

Source: Spruce eats. (<https://www.thespruceeats.com/funnel-cake-bites-5184579>)

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Frosted Lemonade Recipe

- 1/3 cup lemon juice, freshly squeezed
- 3 Tbsp granulated sugar
- 1/3 cup ice cold water
- 3 cups vanilla ice cream

Pour lemon juice, sugar, and 1/3 cup COLD water (no ice) into a blender. Blend until sugar dissolves. Add ice cream to the blender. Blend until combined. Divide into 3 cups. Serve immediately.



Source: Dessert Now Dinner Later
(dessertnowdinnerlater.com/frosted-lemonade-recipe)

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