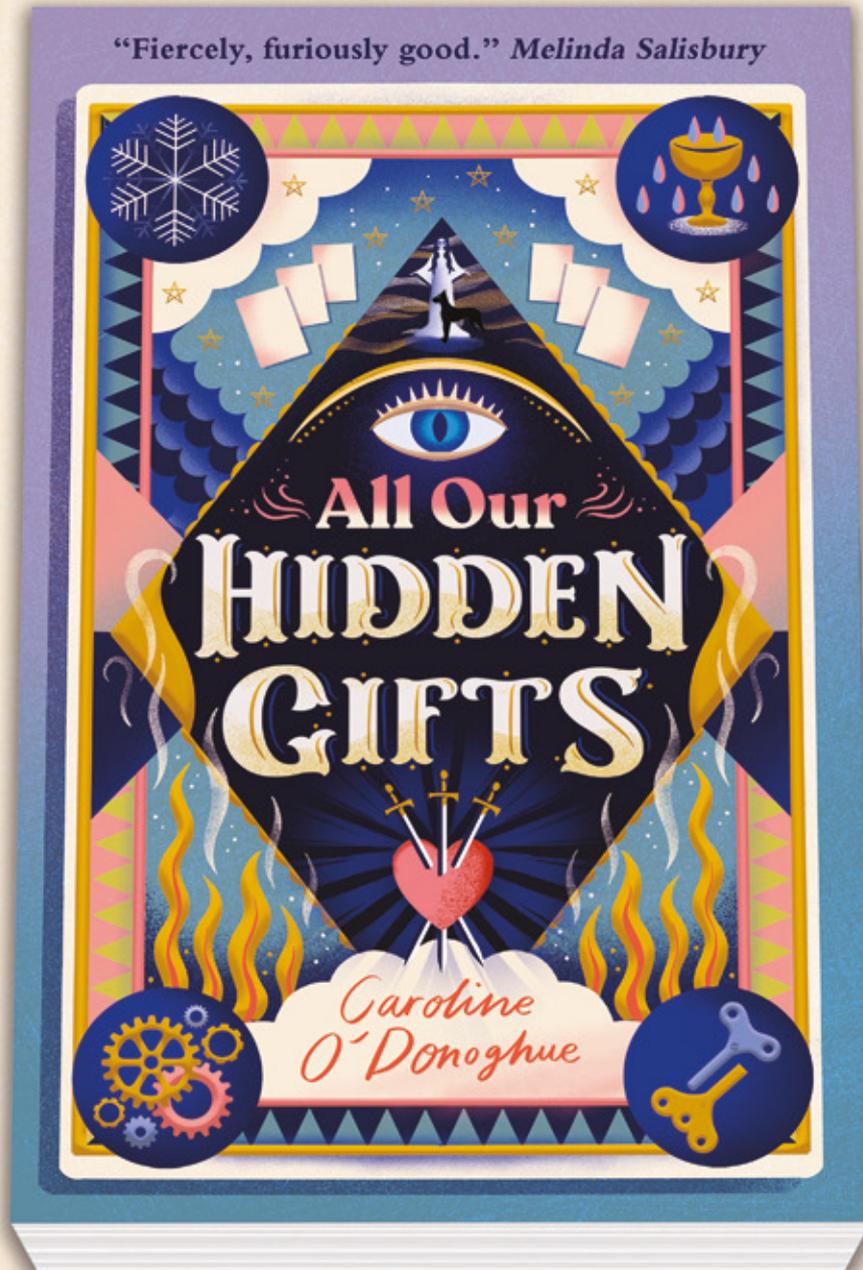




All Our HIDDEN GIFTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

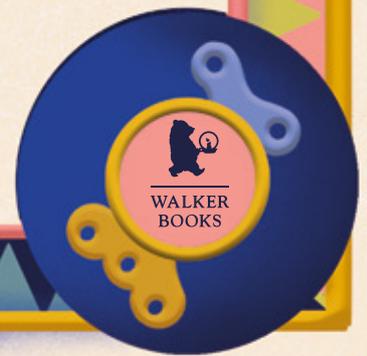
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"Grim, gripping and gorgeous."

Deirdre Sullivan



All Our HIDDEN GIFTS

Caroline O'Donoghue

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

All Our Hidden Gifts is a contemporary and timeless novel in which an old tarot deck, a missing girl and a secretive religious organization become strangely embroiled in the life of sixteen-year-old Maeve Chambers. A vivid picture of modern-day Ireland and its cultural conflicts acts as a backdrop to Maeve's navigation of her shameful past, emerging friendships, romance, and a newly discovered gift for tarot and magic, as she tries to discover what really happened to her former best friend.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caroline O'Donoghue is a journalist and author. She has published two adult novels, *Promising Young Women* and *Scenes of a Graphic Nature*, she has a regular column in *The Irish Examiner*, and has written for *The Irish Independent*, *Glamour*, *Buzzfeed* and *Vice*, among others. Caroline also hosts *Sentimental Garbage*, a podcast in which she reviews commercial women's fiction titles with other authors. *All Our Hidden Gifts* is her first novel for young adults. Visit Caroline on Twitter: @Czaroline

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

Within *All Our Hidden Gifts* are many themes and topics for discussion, some of which may provoke or evoke strong reactions from members of the group. Religion, neo-paganism and arcane practice, LGBTQ discrimination, racism, cults, self-harm, missing persons and identity-based violence are all present and central. It is essential that group members feel able to express themselves freely without fear of reprisal or discrimination; furthermore, members for whom some elements may be difficult or impossible to discuss should be given support and licence to do so, or not to do so. In cases where sensitive personal information is disclosed or known, follow your local safeguarding protocols, and ensure adequate support is in place to support members.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask for group members' opinions of the book. Who enjoyed it? Did anyone not enjoy it? Can they elaborate on their answers? There are lots of themes and ideas within the novel, and much that can be discussed – would anyone like to share any initial thoughts or reflections on what they have read?

1. Tarot

“Tarot doesn't tell the future ... [the cards] only help you analyse your present.” – p. 28

“My relationship to the cards has changed. Something physical, something molecular has happened between us. Us.” – p. 133

Discuss the idea of tarot in the book. What do the tarot cards represent for Maeve? How do the cards help characters 'analyse' their present? Do they help to realise truths? Or reinforce what characters already know? Do they cause things to happen?



WALKER
BOOKS

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2. Perspective

"...sometimes frustration and rage surge through me, sparking out in ways I can't control." – p. 7

O'Donoghue writes the book in the first person, present tense. Discuss the effect of this decision on readers' feelings towards Maeve and other characters. Did group member's perspectives or perceptions change along with Maeve's? If so, in what way? How might the book have differed if it were written in, say, the third person, past tense?

3. Feminism & gender politics

"A group of female servants, mothers, pleaded with their employers to send for the doctor and ... well, they didn't. And the children died." – p. 220

"Rosemary has a strong female energy, and is good for banishing negativity, protection." – p. 253

Discuss the role that feminism and gender play within the novel. Consider the various authority figures and the many strengths and weaknesses of different characters, male, female and non-binary. In what ways are women presented differently in the novel? Consider the differences in belief, in authority and in power to influence between Sister Assumpta, (Saint) Brigid, Maeve, her schoolmates and the Housekeeper.

4. Expectation and achievement

"It sticks, like song lyrics. Like poetry. Like feelings I already had but finally have a map for." – p. 30

Discuss the expectations Maeve and other characters feel or have placed on them, whether religious, cultural, gender normative, sexual or by implication of race or nationality. How does the culture and community within the novel affect how characters view themselves and others? In what ways do characters discover talents independently of, or because of, these expectations?

5. 'Nice' vs 'Good'

"Nice people ... will smile and listen and say, 'Oh no, how terrible' when they hear a sad story. Good people do something about it." – p. 27

Is Maeve a 'nice' character? What about a 'good' character? Discuss the difference O'Donoghue paints between the. How do members of the group view the difference between good and bad people in their own lives? Are all good people nice? Are all nice people good? (You might like to reflect on the character of Aaron, and his television appearance in chapter 34.)

6. Balance

"Everything is balance, weights and counterweights. Like a see-saw, you know?" – p. 197

"I see, 'the host replies.' And, in the interest of balance, we're also going to be hearing from a rep for Children of Brigid..." – p. 302

The theme of balance runs throughout the novel. Discuss how this manifests, and how O'Donoghue approaches this theme in various ways. You might like to consider it across the whole novel – redressing the unbalance Maeve and Lily cause – but also in terms of individual elements, like characters being comfortable within themselves, the idea of a trade off between desire and need, life and death, control and impulse, sacrifice and power, etc. What other balances does the novel contain? What is required to achieve balance? Is balance always a positive thing in the novel?

7. Magic vs Realism

"...all this stuff. The seeds were already planted, Maeve. They already existed." – p. 380

Following the ritual that brings Lilyback, discuss what changes in the world of the novel. What has Maeve's power done? What has it not done? To what extent is magic in the book about a desire or force for change, or a way to 'analyse' the present? Without magic, do the struggles within the novel still exist?



8. Cultural identity

"...the more I let myself just exist, the more fun it gets. So I try not to question it or label it. I'm trying to just see everything as ... negotiable." – p. 206

"Everyone knows her. Black hair, white dress ... Every culture you can think of has some version of the White Lady." – p. 195

The novel is set against an identifiable contemporary background of social issues, politics, community and religion.

Some of this is specific to Ireland, but much of it is relatable for readers anywhere in the world. The novel also includes a wide range of blended identities and cultural movements, including American, Irish, British, Filipino, Catholic, Protestant, pagan, LGBTQ, cults and the supernatural. How do these ideas of identity affect the novel? What similarities can be found between the different cultures represented? In what ways do they cause conflict, and in what ways do they come together harmoniously?

9. The housekeeper

"Everything around me feels like evidence of what a scruffy, scrubby little urchin I am. A bad housekeeper, and a bad friend." – p. 77

What does the Housekeeper represent in the novel? What does a 'housekeeper' do, and how does this relate to the character? Is Maeve a 'bad housekeeper'? What about a 'bad friend'? Discuss the significance of O'Donoghue's addition the tarot deck throughout the novel.

10. Children of Brigid

"I dunno what kind of Ireland you came here for, but we're more or less done with the Bible-bashing bullshit." – p. 108

"It's funny how often I forget that divorce in Ireland is relatively new. We didn't get it until 1995, only ten years before I was born." – p. 313

How does O'Donoghue depict the realities of growing up in a modern-day Ireland? How do the current social battles compare to those of generations before, like Harriet Evans' generation? You might like to consider who 'Brigid' was, incorporating ideas of religion and tolerance. In what ways are these battles cyclical, as Maeve's 'summoning' echoes Harriet's? In what ways are they unique to their time? Expand the discussion to consider how each generation relates to the issues of their present, and understands the world in relation to issues of past generations.

