

Reader's Ring  
Discussion Guide Questions

**Dinner with Anna Karenina**  
by Gloria Goldreich

1. At the first meeting of the book club, Cynthia -- the member of the group who seems to have it all -- announces her separation from her husband. How does the subsequent discussion of *Anna Karenina*, which concentrates on the element of chance in both fiction and real life, relate to her revelation?
2. The reading of *Madame Bovary* causes the group to speculate about a "twenty-first century" Emma Bovary. How would Emma's opinions be different in our own time? Why does Emma's marriage, mired in boredom, frighten the members of the group? Are Trish's efforts to combat the encroaching fatigue of her own marriage realistic?
3. In a discussion of Edith Wharton's life, her work and her decision to divorce, the book club focuses on her wealth and wonder if Cynthia, a high earner, could have separated from her husband if she did not have an income of her own. How has the changing role of women affected the dynamics of modern marriage? Is Cynthia's decision typical or atypical? Relate this to other situations, either fictional or drawn from real life.
4. During the discussion of *The Lottery*, Jen confronts the idea of the woman as victim, which impacts on her relationships with Ian, her sister and her mother. Has Jen created her own "victimhood" and are her efforts to extricate herself realistic? Is it accidental that the victim in *The Lottery* is a woman, given Shirley Jackson's background?
5. Donna observes that Rina has "a propensity for reinventing herself, for disconnecting and reconnecting," as they discuss *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Does the very experience of reading, of identifying with a story or a character, offer the opportunity to reinvent one's world, to escape into another era, another persona? Is this what drew this group of New York women to meet with such regularity and such intensity?
6. Why does Elizabeth, trapped as she is in an unhappy marriage and unhappy motherhood, decide on a discussion of Sylvia Plath? Much of that chapter is based on a discussion of food -- why is food so central to these dinner meetings? Trace back the menus and relate them to the corresponding chapters.

7. What impels Donna to alter the direction of her own life and exorcise the ghosts of her past (her father's illness and her mother's suicide)? How did the books under discussion and actual events, such as the illness of Rina's son and the death of Jen and Elizabeth's mother, impact on her decision?
8. The women read *Little Women* and experience a backward odyssey into the joys of childhood reading. What books, read during your younger years, would you revisit, and why?
9. How did the book club discussions over the year influence Cynthia's understanding of her own marriage? Were you surprised by her reconciliation? What alternate ending could you have envisaged?
10. Do you think the book-club members were truly friends? What elements of friendship bound them together beyond the parameters of their shared addiction to literature? Which member of the group would you want to claim as a friend, and why?