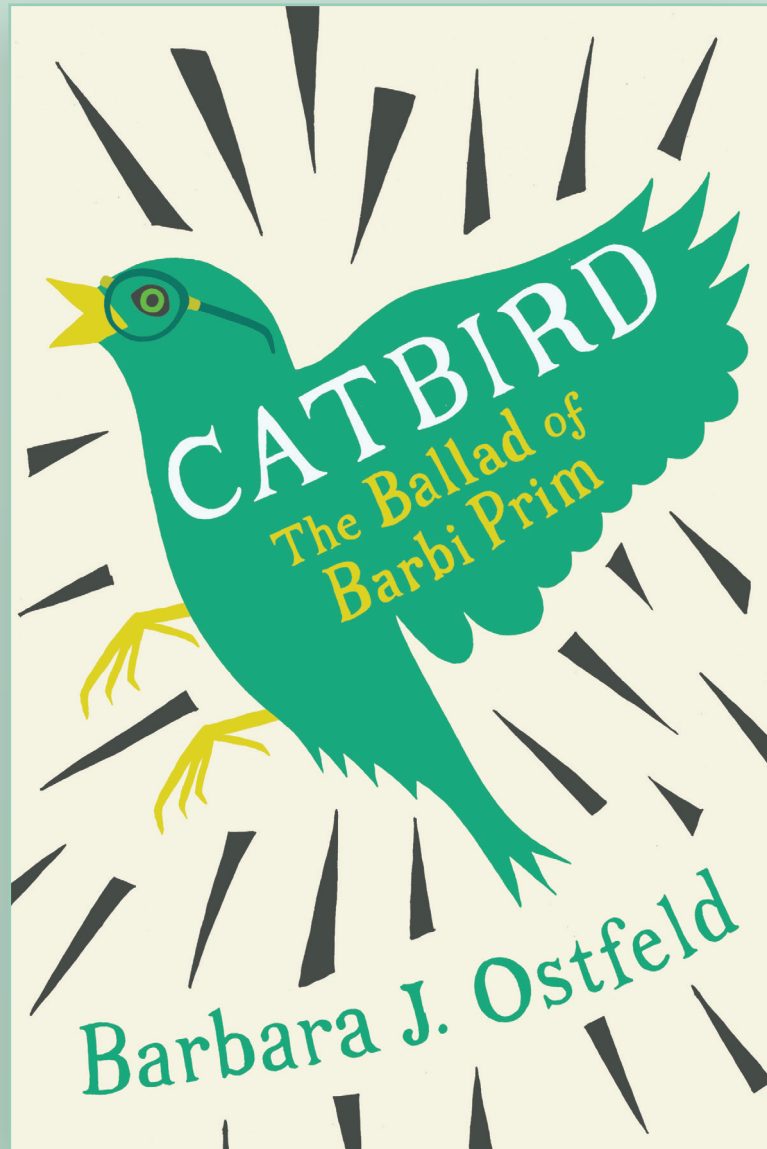


A Reading Guide for Deep, Personal Discussions

CATBIRD *The Ballad of Barbi Prim*



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TRIGGER WARNING: This guide contains information about sexual assault and/or violence, which may be triggering to survivors.

Questions

1. When she was growing up, Barbara was excluded from Brownie troop sleepovers. As a child, if you were excluded, what was the reason? Did that exclusion have a lasting effect on you?
2. The ethical values taught by Barbara's parents and the civil rights lessons she learned in synagogue defined her thinking as a child and as an adult. What are the valued childhood teachings that remain with you?
3. Barbara's self-image was shaped by her father's assertion that she wasn't as smart as he was. Are you haunted by something someone said to you in childhood? What is it, and why did it make such an impression? How does it affect you now?
4. Barbara recalls looking in the mirror in the restroom of her childhood synagogue and registering that she didn't look like the other junior choir members, even though they were wearing identical clothing. Can you describe the particular moment when you realized that you weren't like other kids in some way? What was your perceived difference?
5. Barbara had an eccentric grandmother whom she loved. Can you describe the effect that a beloved quirky figure had on you when you were a child?
6. Barbara loved books and dolls, rings and lace, being in temple, and anything that struck her as beautiful. What did you love most in childhood? How do you feel about the same things now?
7. Barbara remembers being sad as a small child. As an older child and as an adult, she came to identify with the sadness of other people. Have you had the experience of redeeming a childhood source of hurt? How did you accomplish this?
8. Barbara vividly remembers a time in junior high when a group of students taunted a boy who had developmental disabilities. How were you affected by witnessing cruelty when you were growing up?

Thoughts



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9. Barbara and her siblings struggled with their father's alcoholism and drug abuse. If you've been in a similar situation, can you recall how you were affected when you were a child? How have you begun to move forward?
10. Barbara describes her initial inability to advocate professionally for herself. Do you look back on the beginning of your work life and remember feeling inadequate? In what ways? Have you been able to achieve some work goals despite that feeling? How?
11. In "My Strapless Dress Meets Joyce," Barbara feels shame. Has shame or its avoidance been a part of your career decisions?
12. What do you think accounts for the fact that so many high-achieving women secretly feel like they're faking their success?
13. Barbara attributes her status as the first ordained woman cantor to an accident of timing. In what ways has timing influenced your life or career?
14. Barbara overthinks and has invasive thoughts. How does your internal dialogue affect you?
15. Fifteen years into her second marriage, Barbara was shocked by the revelation of husband's sexual identity. Can you describe a dramatic shift in any of your relationships and how that change affected your life?
16. Barbara was hell-bent on earning the approval of her male supervising rabbis. Have you experienced something similar in your professional life? Your personal life?
17. Barbara wishes that she could "rewind the tape" and have a do-over of certain stages of courting and parenting. What would you do over if you could? Have you discussed this with anyone who was affected by your behavior?
18. Barbara places a lot of emphasis on the ways that psychotherapy has improved her life. If you've had psychotherapy, how has it affected you? Do you feel more confident talking about it after having read *Catbird*? If you haven't had psychotherapy, has *Catbird* affected your impressions of it?

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19. In retirement, Barbara starts painting with water colors for the first time. What creative venture might you pursue in retirement? If you're retired now, are you pursuing an unexpectedly fulfilling activity?
20. Barbara has evolving thoughts about God that began in childhood. Can you trace your theological roots back to childhood? How has your thinking about God changed over the years?
21. Psychologist Erik Erikson said that “the richest and fullest lives attempt to achieve an inner balance between three realms: work, love, and play.” In which of those three areas do you spend most of your time? Why? Are you interested in creating a more harmonious balance between the three?
22. Barbara emphasizes connection (to people, work, art, God) as a primary source of joy. What are your ongoing sources of joy?

Thoughts

