



**Georgetown Township Public Library
Book Discussion Guide**

Call the Midwife
Jennifer Worth (2011)

About This Book

Jennifer Worth gained her midwife training in the 1950s among an Anglican order of nuns dedicated to ensuring safer childbirth for the poor living amid the Docklands slums on the East End of London. Her engaging memoir retraces those early years caring for the indigent and unfortunate during the pinched postwar era in London, when health care was nearly nonexistent, antibiotics brand-new, sanitary facilities rare, contraception unreliable and families with 13 or more children the norm. Working alongside the trained nurses and midwives of St. Raymund Nonnatus (a pseudonym she's given the place), Worth made frequent visits to the tenements that housed the dock workers and their families, often in the dead of night on her bicycle. Her well-polished anecdotes are teeming with character detail of some of the more memorable nurses she worked with, such as the six-foot-two Camilla Fortescue-Cholmeley-Browne, called Chummy, who renounced her genteel upbringing to become a nurse, or the dotty old Sister Monica Joan, who fancied cakes immoderately. Patients included Molly, only 19 and already trapped in poverty and degradation with several children and an abusive husband; Mrs. Conchita Warren, who was delivering her 24th baby; or the birdlike vagrant, Mrs. Jenkins, whose children were taken away from her when she entered the workhouse.

- *Publishers Weekly*

From: <http://www.penguin.com/book>

About the Author

JENNIFER WORTH (1935-2011) trained as a nurse at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, England. She then moved to London to train as a midwife. She later became a staff nurse at the Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, and then ward sister at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital in Euston. Music had always been her passion and in 1973 Jennifer left nursing in order to study music intensively. She gained the Licentiate of the London College of Music in 1974 and was awarded a fellowship ten years later.

From: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com>

Discussion Questions

1. Even though the Docklands were notoriously dangerous, the midwives and district nurses were able to walk unaccompanied without fear. Is there a comparable profession today?
2. How many children in a family do you think is ideal? Why?
3. Discuss the Church's decision to take away Mary's baby. Would she have been able to provide for it without turning to prostitution?
4. Worth asks, "What woman worthy of the name Mother would stand on a high moral platform about selling her body if her child were dying of hunger and exposure? Not I." Is it biology or psychology that drives women to extreme measures to protect their children while fathers often deny paternity or their parental responsibilities?
5. Should Doris have allowed Cyril to send away the baby she bore illegitimately? Did she have a choice?
6. Ted became a loving and wonderful father to Edward without actually being his biological father. How important is biology in the parent-child relationship?
7. Babies as premature as Conchita's twenty-fifth child are never allowed to stay home today. Do you think he would have survived if he had been taken to the hospital?
8. After learning of their respective histories, Worth radically changes her opinion of both Sister Evangelina and Mrs. Jenkins. Share an episode in your own life when your initial dislike for a person transformed once you got to know him or her better.
9. During the time that Worth recounts, most women delivered their babies at home and were deeply suspicious of hospitals. Today, the opposite is true. How do you think such a dramatic change came about and is it for better or for worse?
10. If you have children, did you use a midwife? If you don't but are planning to have children, would you? Why or why not?

From: <http://www.penguin.com/read/book-clubs>

Resources for additional information about book discussion choices and authors:

Books & Authors (Access through links to MeL Databases on Library's webpage.)
<http://bna.galegroup.com/bna/>

LitLovers.com
www.litlovers.com

Overbooked.com
<http://www.overbooked.com>

Penguin.com (USA)
<http://www.us.penguin.com/static/pages/bookclubs/index.html>

Reading Group Center
<http://reading-group-center.knopfdoubleday.com>

Reading Group Guides
<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>

Suggested print resources:

The Book Club Companion: A Comprehensive Guide to the Reading Group Experience
Diana Loevy
374.22 Loevy 2006

The Book Group Book: A Thoughtful Guide to Forming and Enjoying a Stimulating Book Discussion Group
Ellen Slezak (editor)
374.22 Book 2000

Good Books Lately: The One-Stop Resource for Book Groups and Other Greedy Readers
Ellen Moore and Kira Stevens
374.22 Moore 2004

Read It and Eat: A Month-by-Month Guide to Scintillating Book Club Selections and Mouthwatering Menus
Sarah Gardner
028.9 Gardner 2005

The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know, From Choosing Members to Leading Discussions
Rachel W. Jacobsohn
374.22 Jacobsohn 1994

What Do I Read Next? (Multi-volume set, annual editions)
Gale Research Inc.
R 016.813 What