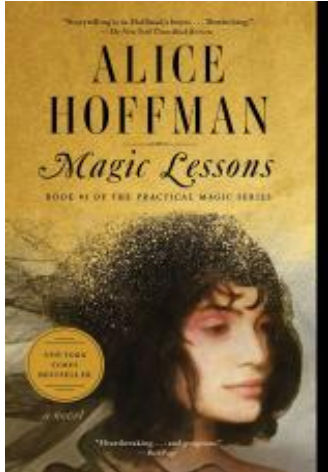

Magic Lessons: Book #1 of the Practical Magic Series

by Alice Hoffman



About the Book

In an unforgettable novel that traces a centuries-old curse to its source, beloved author Alice Hoffman unveils the story of Maria Owens, accused of witchcraft in Salem, and matriarch of a line of the amazing Owens women and men featured in PRACTICAL MAGIC and THE RULES OF MAGIC.

Where does the story of the Owens bloodline begin? With Maria Owens, in the 1600s, when she's abandoned in a snowy field in rural England as a baby. Under the care of Hannah Owens, Maria learns about the "Unnamed Arts." Hannah recognizes that Maria has a gift, and she teaches the girl all she knows. It is here that she learns her first important lesson: Always love someone who will love you back.

When Maria is abandoned by the man who has declared his love for her, she follows him to Salem, Massachusetts. Here she invokes the curse that will haunt her family. And it's here that she learns the rules of magic and the lesson that she will carry with her for the rest of her life. Love is the only thing that matters.

MAGIC LESSONS is a celebration of life and love and a showcase of Alice Hoffman's masterful storytelling.

Discussion Guide

1. This novel is both historical fiction and magical realism. How does Alice Hoffman blend both genres? What are examples from each genre in the book?
2. Maria studies the Nameless Art under Hannah Owens and her mother, Rebecca. Hannah and Rebecca have different values. What are they? How do those differences influence what they teach Maria?

3. Early in the novel, Rebecca teaches Maria, "Love could ruin your life or set you free; it could happen by chance or be a well-planned decision." (45) How does this advice foreshadow Maria's relationship with John Hathorne and Samuel Dias?
4. There is a song that Maria recalls throughout her journey that starts with the lyric "The water is wide, I cannot get o'er it." Think about when the song appears in the novel. How does the meaning of the lyrics change as Maria deals with new challenges and heartache?
5. In Maria's travels, she meets Jewish refugees from Spain and Portugal who have left their home countries to escape persecution. How does Alice Hoffman weave Jewish history into the story?
6. Maria encounters discrimination against women in both the old world and the new. In a world where most women are illiterate and have no power, Maria knows "a woman with her own beliefs who refuses to bow to those she believes to be wrong can be considered dangerous." (107) How does Maria rebel against societal constraints? How does she create her own fate?
7. On her hanging day, Maria calls down a family curse as she seeks "to protect herself and her daughter and any of their descendants from the grief she'd known." (220) Does the curse successfully protect her and Faith from grief?
8. Note Maria's relationship to Cadin, her crow, and Faith's to Keeper. Crows are described as "more loyal than any other man or beast" (35) and Keeper waits years for Faith to return. Have you ever had an emotional connection to an animal? Have you experienced empathy from an animal?
9. Faith is a talented witch and deeply loved by her mother, but after she's kidnapped and held prisoner, she changes. Faith takes up the Dark Arts and studies *The Book of the Raven*, interested in revenge. Do you think her anger at her father is justified? Do we sometimes lash out at those we love best?
10. After reading the novel, reconsider the title. What are the "magic lessons" that Maria and Faith were first taught, and what are the lessons they learn to live by after overcoming suffering?
11. Love is central to the story. Every character in the story is disappointed by love, but also needs love. Discuss the different types of love that are explored in this book.
12. The Owens family curse continues for generations, but Maria still manages to save Samuel. How do they avoid the family curse?

Author Bio

Alice Hoffman is the author of more than 30 works of fiction, including MAGIC LESSONS, THE WORLD THAT WE KNEW, PRACTICAL MAGIC, THE RULES OF MAGIC (a Reese Witherspoon Book Club pick), the Oprah's Book Club selection HERE ON EARTH, THE RED GARDEN, THE DOVEKEEPERS, THE MUSEUM OF EXTRAORDINARY THINGS, THE MARRIAGE OF OPPOSITES and FAITHFUL. She lives near Boston.

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