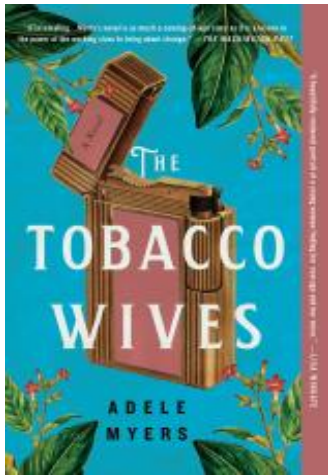


# The Tobacco Wives

by Adele Myers

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## About the Book

*North Carolina, 1946. One woman. A discovery that could rewrite history.*

Maddie Sykes is a burgeoning seamstress who has just arrived in Bright Leaf, North Carolina --- the tobacco capital of the South --- where her aunt has a thriving sewing business. After years of war rations and shortages, Bright Leaf is a prosperous wonderland in full technicolor bloom, and Maddie is dazzled by the bustle of the crisply uniformed female factory workers, the palatial homes and, most of all, her aunt's glossiest clientele: the wives of the powerful tobacco executives.

But she soon learns that Bright Leaf isn't quite the carefree paradise that it seems. A trail of misfortune follows many of the women, including substantial health problems. Although Maddie is quick to believe that this is a coincidence, she inadvertently uncovers evidence that suggests otherwise.

Maddie wants to report what she knows, but in a town where everyone depends on Big Tobacco to survive, she doesn't know who she can trust --- and fears that exposing the truth may destroy the lives of the proud, strong women with whom she has forged strong bonds.

Shedding light on the hidden history of women's activism during the post-war period, at its heart, **THE TOBACCO WIVES** is a deeply human, emotionally satisfying and dramatic novel about the power of female connection and the importance of seeking truth.

## Discussion Guide

1. The women of Bright Leaf seem to have it all --- beauty, power and privilege. However, as Maddie becomes drawn into their world, she suspects that their lives may not be as perfect as they appear to be. How did Maddie's opinion of

- the women shift throughout the summer? What were the lessons she learned from them? Have you experienced situations in which someone appeared to "have it all" but really didn't?
2. Maddie is determined to take care of herself, insisting that she has no interest in boys or marriage. Why does she feel so strongly about this? Why do you think she changes her mind after David comes into her life?
  3. Why do you think that Mitzy took such an immediate interest in Maddie? Do you feel that Mitzy is a positive mother-figure for Maddie? In what ways do Maddie's interactions with her own mother subvert the traditional mother-daughter relationship?
  4. What were some of the opportunities created as a result of women taking over men's jobs at Bright Leaf Tobacco? What were the challenges?
  5. How did Cornelia's books impact Maddie's choices that summer? Why do you think that Cornelia gave Maddie those particular books? What was the most influential book you have read? Who would you share it with in your life?
  6. Before the dangers of smoking were known, communities like Bright Leaf were immensely proud of their towns and industry. Why do you think it was difficult for these communities to stop supporting the tobacco industry? How do you think they felt when they discovered that the cigarettes they were producing made people sick and even killed them? What would you do if you were in that position?
  7. Tobacco executives like Mr. Winston and medical professionals like Dr. Hale began to learn about the dangers of smoking in the 1950s and 1960s, yet many continued to sell and support the industry. How do you think they reconciled this with themselves? Do you think they really believed that smoking was safe, or did they know the dangers and look the other way?
  8. Tobacco companies were among the first to use advertising to deliberately deceive the public. Knowing that damning medical studies would eventually come out, they created campaigns to influence and mislead consumers. Tobacco advertising on television and radio was banned in 1970, and additional restrictions have been placed on the industry over the years. Do you think these restrictions made a difference on public perceptions of smoking? Should advertising be banned or restricted in other industries?
  9. Several male characters suggest that work is harmful to pregnant women. Dr. Hale goes so far as to blame working for the increase in premature births. How have misconceptions surrounding pregnancy shifted over the decades? Do you feel that pregnant women still face difficulties in the workplace?
  10. What did you think Mitzy would say when she interrupted Mr. Winston during his Gala speech? Do you agree with her decision? What would you have done if you were in her position?

## **Author Bio**

Adele Myers grew up in Asheville, North Carolina and has a journalism degree from the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill. She currently works in advertising and lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband, son and their rescue dog, Chipper. THE TOBACCO WIVES is her first novel.

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