

## Freeborn Girls – Book Club Guide

Please note that if you haven't already read the book, there are some spoilers in the discussion points below.

There are some discussion points for the modern storyline, some for the historic one, and some thematic ones across the whole book.

### 2019 story about Frances Quilter

1. A working woman with a demanding job and a sick parent—but no children. How many women juggle with these pressures and more? Has the story changed your views of politicians?

2. *“What’s the point of you?”*

*Freeborn girls Chapters 9 and 25*

Derek Rawlings, the property developer, and Laurelle Miller, the community activist, both heaped scorn on Frances for being ineffective on the things that mattered. What are your views of her, as a politician, as a daughter, and in her personal relationships?

3. An estimated 1.4 million people in the UK—including 175,000 children—have no recourse to public funds, which means they are not entitled to any support from the state, such as council housing, free NHS services or cash benefits. This can be for a variety of reasons. Some because they are in the UK legally but do not yet qualify for any help from the welfare state. Some have no recourse to public funds because they are here illegally. Miracle James is one of these 1.4 million people with no recourse to public funds.

Do you think Miracle James should have been helped—regardless of her immigration status—if only because of her baby?

*“She was such a sweet girl. All she needed was a visa and a place to live.”*

*Freeborn Girls, Chapter 25*

This was Laurelle’s view of Miracle. Do you agree?

4. *What did I think I was doing, letting the government pull down their homes? The low rise might be crumbling and the tower blocks full of mould, but they were theirs, where they'd been plonked by the council, which their children had endured, from which their men had buggered off, and which they were now to be chucked out of to make way for what? "Not people like us." The woman sitting at a table near the back didn't need a megaphone.*

*Freeborn Girls, Chapter 1*

Regeneration—revitalising rundown urban areas so local people got more chances in life, or pushing up property prices so they were forced out. There was conflict on the Cooper Estate about the proposals. Did Frances make a difficult situation worse?

5. *I was wearing a beach wrap Gerald had bought me in Italy. She was wearing jeans and a striped cotton shirt and gardening shoes.*

*Freeborn Girls, Chapter 17*

The showdown between Frances and Sylvia, Toby's wife. Whose side are you on and why?

### **1643 story about Elizabeth Gardiner**

1. Will and Rebecca have different views about the monarchy, the church and, ultimately, their family. Will chooses to abandon them to join the war, Rebecca stays and then flees with the children. Is it as simple as that? And if so, whose side are you on?

2. The Gardiner family rallies round to care for Mary and protect her. What's your view of the way society treats people with disabilities today?

3. Thousands of people left London and elsewhere in what is now the UK as indentured labourers, bound over to work for five to seven years for a "master" in return for their passage to America. Similar systems of indentured labour have been used in other parts of the world.

Elizabeth Gardiner took the view that in being bound over like this, she was sold, and lost her freedom.

What do you think are the differences between indentured labour systems and slavery

4. *Crowded in the small boat were the desperate, the hopeful, the despairing. People who had sold everything they'd ever owned, borrowed every last penny from their families, indentured themselves to get a place on a boat to take them to a new life in America. Children rounded up off the streets, abandoned, lost, or inattentive. Scoundrels fleeing justice, idealists pursuing their dreams. And among them Elizabeth, huddled with her bundle of possessions.*

*Freeborn Girls, Chapter 12*

Are these the same pressures that make people migrate today?

5. *"What kind of savages have we become?"*

*Freeborn Girls, Chapter 20*

Hywel Williams poses the challenge to the ship-wrecked community on Ocracoke. What do you think of tensions on the island?

### **Thematic discussion points**

1. Freeborn Girls is written in two voices: the modern storyline is in the first person, and the historic one is in the third person. How does this effect your reading of the book and your relationship with the characters?

2. *I wondered whether all Stephanie saw there was grey concrete housing on the brink of*

*destruction. Or whether in her mind's eye she saw past that to the brighter colours of a lost world.*

*Freeborn Girls Chapter 3*

Do you think the different writing styles reflect the different settings for the two stories: the one rural, the other urban?

3. *Politics is just stand up for sad people.*

*Politics is still about the struggle to build a new world in which life chances aren't determined by the fault-lines of injustice that run through the old.*

*Freeborn Girls Chapter 27*

The first were the words of Joey. The second were Frances'. Which of these comes closest to your view? Why?

4. Freeborn Girls has two storylines. One set in 2019; the other in 1639-1643, both times of great change. How effectively do you think Stephanie links the two stories?

5. Both Elizabeth Gardiner and Frances Quilter were forceful women in their own, very different ways. Do you find parallels between their stories?