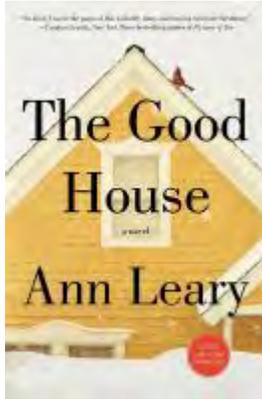


Oliver Wolcott Library
The Good House By Ann Leary
Book Discussion Guide
Prepared by Caitlin Costa



About the Book:

Hildy Good is a lifelong resident of a small community on the rocky coast of Boston's North Shore, and knows pretty much everything about everyone. She is a successful real-estate broker, mother, and grandmother, her days are full. She is also a raging alcoholic. Hildy's family held an intervention for her about a year ago and, sent her off to rehab. Now she's in recovery—more or less.

Alone and feeling unjustly persecuted, Hildy finds a friend in Rebecca McAllister, one of the town's wealthy newcomers. Rebecca is grateful for the friendship and Hildy feels like a person of the world again, as she and Rebecca escape their worries with some harmless gossip and a bottle of wine by the fire—just one of their secrets. However, not everyone takes to Rebecca, who the subject of town gossip.

When Frank Getchell, an old friend who shares a complicated history with Hildy, tries to warn her away from Rebecca, Hildy attempts to protect her friend from a potential scandal. Soon, however, Hildy is busy trying to protect her own reputation. When a cluster of secrets becomes dangerously entwined, the reckless behavior of one person threatens to expose the other, and this darkly comic novel takes a chilling turn.

Source: litlovers.com

About the Author:

Ann Leary is the author of the memoir *An Innocent, A Broad* and the novel *Outtakes from a Marriage*. She has written fiction and nonfiction for various magazines and literary publications and is a cohost of the NPR weekly radio show *Hash Hags*.

Source: *Barnesandnoble.com*

Book Reviews:

“One of the best works of Massachusetts fiction in recent memory...Hildy, the novel’s most ingenious creation, is an unsentimental and complicated wiseass, and the force of her character makes *The Good House* more than a Cheeveresque take on New England society” —Boston Magazine

“A layered and complex portrait of a woman struggling with addiction, in a town where no secret stays secret for long.” —J. Courtney Sullivan, *The New York Times Book Review*

“Hildy is an original, irresistibly likable and thoroughly untrustworthy ... a genuinely funny novel about alcoholism.” —*Kirkus (starred review)*

“Leary’s powerfully perceptive and smartly nuanced portrait of the perils of alcoholism is enhanced by her spot-on depiction of staid New England village life and the redemption to be found in traditions and community.” —*Booklist*

Discussion Questions:

1. Hildy Good is a complex and layered character—some might say an “unreliable narrator.” Is there a point at which you question Hildy’s dependability? Is there a point at which she redeems herself?
2. Hildy likes to entertain others with her “psychic powers” and yet she also informs people that she really doesn’t have any special intuition, that she “just knows a few tricks.” Does this duality show up in other parts of her personality?
3. The New England setting is very much part of *The Good House*. And yet the author doesn’t spend a lot of time on the description of the area. What makes this book so quintessentially New England?
4. What do you think of Hildy’s assertion that she can tell everything about a person just by walking through his or her house?
5. Wendover, Massachusetts, is being taken over by hedge-fund managers who “want it old, but want it new.” Do you think there will ever be a point at which they are accepted by the “townies?”
6. Why do you think Hildy and newcomer Rebecca McAllister become such fast friends?
7. What do you think of the author’s portrayal of alcoholism and its effects on the drinker and those around them?

8. What happens to Hildy's attitudes about others when she drinks?

9. Frank Getchell seems an unlikely romantic figure. Why do you think he has carried a torch for Hildy all these years?

10. Hildy claims to be unsentimental about relationships and things. Do you believe this is true about her personality?

Further Reading:

Here I Go Again by Jen Lancaster

Twenty years after ruling the halls of her suburban Chicago high school, Lissy Ryder doesn't understand why her glory days ended. In High School, she was worshipped, beloved and feared. Present day, not so much. She's been pink-slipped from her high-paying job, dumped by her husband and kicked out of her condo. Now, at thirty-seven, she's struggling to start a business out of her parents' garage and sleeping under the hair-band posters in her old bedroom. Her life now is miserable because of her past, but it's not like she can go back in time and change who she was...or can she?

The Interesting's by Meg Wolitzer

The summer that Nixon resigns, Ethan, Jonah, Cathy, Ash, Goodman and Jules are six teenagers at a summer camp for the arts become inseparable. Decades later the bond remains powerful, but so much else has changed. The kind of creativity that is rewarded at age fifteen is not always enough to propel someone through life at age thirty; not everyone can sustain, in adulthood, what seemed so special in adolescence. Jules Jacobson, an aspiring comic actress, eventually resigns herself to a more practical occupation and lifestyle. Her friend Jonah, a gifted musician, stops playing the guitar and becomes an engineer. However Ethan and Ash, Jules's now-married best friends, become shockingly successful—true to their initial artistic dreams, with the wealth and access that allow those dreams to keep expanding. The friendships endure and even prosper, but also underscore the differences in their fates, in what their talents have become and the shapes their lives have taken.

View From Penthouse B by Elinor Lipman

Unexpectedly widowed Gwen-Laura Schmidt is still mourning her husband, Edwin, when her older sister Margot invites her to join forces as roommates in her luxurious Village apartment. For Margot, divorced amid scandal (her husband was a fertility doctor) and then made Ponzi-poor, it's a chance to shake Gwen out of her grief and help make ends meet. To further this effort she enlists a third boarder, the handsome, cupcake-baking Anthony. As the three swap money-making schemes and timid Gwen ventures back out into the dating world, the arrival of Margot's paroled ex in the efficiency apartment downstairs creates not just complications but the chance for all sorts of unexpected forgiveness.

Faith by Jennifer Haigh

When Sheila McGann sets out to redeem her disgraced brother, a once-beloved Catholic priest in suburban Boston. Her quest will force her to confront cataclysmic truths about her fractured Irish-American family, her beliefs, and, ultimately, herself. Award-winning author Jennifer Haigh follows her critically acclaimed novels *Mrs. Kimble* and *The Condition* with a captivating, vividly rendered portrait of fraying family ties, and the trials of belief and devotion, in *Faith*

The Burgess Boys by Elizabeth Strout

Haunted by the freak accident that killed their father when they were children, Jim and Bob Burgess escaped from their Maine hometown of Shirley Falls for New York City as soon as they possibly could. Jim, a sleek, successful corporate lawyer, has belittled his bighearted brother their whole lives, and Bob, a Legal Aid attorney who idolizes Jim, has always taken it in stride. However, their long-standing dynamic is upended when their sister, Susan—the Burgess sibling who stayed behind—urgently calls them home. Her lonely teenage son, Zach, has gotten himself into a world of trouble, and Susan desperately needs their help. The Burgess brothers return to the landscape of their childhood, where the long-buried tensions that have shaped and shadowed their relationship begin to surface in unexpected ways that will change them forever.

The Good House is about an alcoholic real estate agent in a small New England town who pretends to be sober, and has disastrous consequences.