

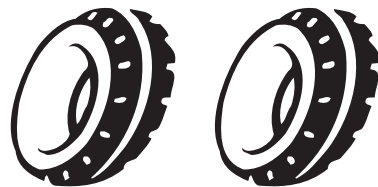
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Circe

by Madeline Miller

BOOK GROUP

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Madeline Miller grew up in New York City and Philadelphia. She attended Brown University, where she earned her BA and MA in Classics. She has taught and tutored Latin, Greek, and Shakespeare to high school students for over fifteen years.

The Song of Achilles, her first novel, was awarded the 2012 Orange Prize for Fiction and was a *New York Times* Bestseller. Miller was also shortlisted for the 2012 Stonewall Writer of the Year. Her second novel, *Circe*, was an instant number 1 *New York Times* bestseller, and won the Indies Choice Best Adult Fiction of the Year Award and the Indies Choice Best Audiobook of the Year Award, as well as being shortlisted for the 2019 Women's Prize for Fiction. *Circe* also won The Red Tentacle Award, an American Library Association Alex Award (adult books of special interest to teen readers), and the 2018 Elle Big Book Award. It is currently being adapted for a series with HBO Max. Miller's novels have been translated into over twenty-five languages including Dutch, Mandarin, Japanese, Turkish, Arabic and Greek, and her essays have appeared in a number of publications including the *Guardian*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Telegraph*, *Lapham's Quarterly* and NPR.org. She currently lives outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

BOOK SUMMARY

In the house of Helios, god of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe is a strange child—not powerful, like her father, nor viciously alluring like her mother. Turning to the world of mortals for companionship, she discovers that she does possess power—the power of witchcraft, which can transform rivals into monsters and menace the gods themselves.

Threatened, Zeus banishes her to a deserted island, where she hones her occult craft, tames wild beasts and crosses paths with many of the most famous figures in all of mythology, including the Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus, the murderous Medea, and, of course, wily Odysseus.

But there is danger, too, for a woman who stands alone, and Circe unwittingly draws the wrath of both men and gods, ultimately finding herself pitted against one of the most terrifying and vengeful of the Olympians. To protect what she loves most, Circe must summon all her strength and choose, once and for all, whether she belongs with the gods she is born from, or the mortals she has come to love.

With unforgettably vivid characters, mesmerizing language, and page-turning suspense, *Circe* is a triumph of storytelling, an intoxicating epic of family rivalry, palace intrigue, love and loss, as well as a celebration of indomitable female strength in a man's world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. First, if you read *The Odyssey*, did you remember Circe? How is she different in this book from that portrayal?
2. As soon as Circe is born, the odds are stacked against her. She's a nymph with the voice of a mortal. Since she's not "classically" beautiful like her mother, or strong like her father—the rest of her family finds her useless and a pest. What were your impressions of the beginning of the book and her family's treatment of her?
3. A significant moment in the book is Circe's interaction with Prometheus where she shows him kindness. Why do you think Circe was compelled to talk with Prometheus and how was this a defining moment for her?
4. Why do you think Circe was curious about mortals?
5. Once Circe discovers her inner power, why do you think these powerful gods and goddesses feared Circe?
6. While her family thought banishing her would be a great punishment, it actually set her free from their mistreatment and she becomes her own person on the island Aiaia. And later on in the book, Penelope finds solace on Aiaia. What do you think it was about Aiaia that gives these women inner peace? What do you think is the contemporary version of Aiaia?
7. There are appearances from Hermes, the messenger of the Gods; Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus; Circe's niece, the murderous Medea; and the goddess Athena. Which one of those encounters did you enjoy the most? Which god or goddess do you wish would have shown up in the book?
8. Circe does indeed turn men into pigs. And she does it quite often. Let's talk about the symbolism of her turning the men into swine.
9. What did you think about her relationship with Odysseus? Were you surprised she eventually trusts and falls for Odysseus despite being wronged by so many men, both God and mortal?
10. Despite their short-lived romance, it has a long-lasting impact with the birth of her son, Telegonus. We see how far Circe is willing to go for her son with her refusal to sacrifice him to Athena. How else does Telegonus change Circe?
11. The book takes a turn when Telegonus goes to Ithaca. When he comes back to the island with Penelope and Telemachus, were you surprised at their reasonings for coming to Aiaia?
12. What did you think about the eventual romance with Telemachus?
13. Circe eventually chooses her own path for how she wants to live and makes her big choice at the end. Did you like the ending? Why or why not?

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