



## LAST LESSONS OF SUMMER: Book Club Discussion Guide

*Irrelevant factoid: Orb weavers like the [Argiope](#) have been used in drug tests. Barbiturates cause them to weave large irregular webs; marijuana, regular but smaller; LSD? More symmetrical ones, as if the spider is too stoned to be distracted. But caffeine sends them spinning out of control.*

**Margaret Maron on the writing of *Last Lessons of Summer*:** *Last Lessons of Summer* is a standalone novel set in “Colleton County,” the fictional home of Judge Deborah Knott. The crimes are investigated by two men close to her, SBI Agent Terry Wilson and Sheriff’s Deputy Dwight Bryant, yet she herself does not appear in this book.

Several threads went into the plot of this book: (1) reading that A. A. Milne’s son, the real Christopher Robin, was resentful that his dad had co-opted the stuffed animals and imaginary world of his childhood led me to give a similar, but greatly exaggerated situation to a little girl named Maxine. I made her parents a failed poet and a gifted illustrator who were so wrapped up in each other that they had little affection left for the child; (2) my own fascination with Argiopes, the common orb-weaving “writing” spiders; (3) a lovely “recovered memory” triggered by my own first full-body massage; and (4) the realization that not every family clings to its ancestral land and that many are more than happy to sell the family farm to developers.

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. How does the myth that has grown up around the origin of Pink and Blue differ from the reality of their first appearance at that 1938 baby shower?
2. One of Frances’s coworkers declares that she herself would rather have a tugboat for a husband than a dreamboat. Discuss.
3. How does this baby shower foreshadow the rest of the book and even affect Frances’s granddaughter years later?
4. At one point, Amy asks her stepbrother why he got to call her father Dad, but she was never allowed to call his mother Mom. How did that simple difference affect the dynamics of the blended family?
5. Amy’s younger sister Beth unwittingly causes Amy to recover a crucial memory. Has something similar ever triggered your own memory of something you had completely forgotten?
6. Beth tells Amy, “You’ve never had to worry about money. What’s pocket change for you might be a fortune to someone else.” One of the sub-themes of the book is power and money—who has it and who wants or doesn’t want it. Did you find the final division of PBM’s labor and power logical and fair?
7. In the end, has Amy chosen her future or has she settled for it?

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