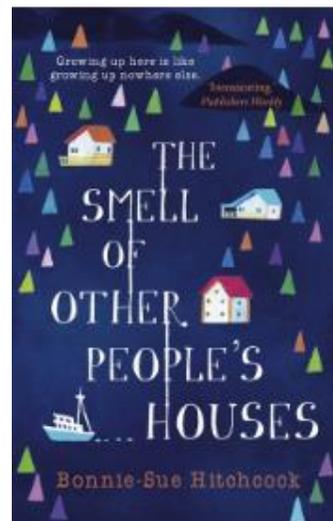


2017 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **The Smell of Other People's Houses**

Author: **Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock**

Publisher: **Faber**



ALASKA

Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock has described Alaska as “such a funny, interesting place”. If it’s not a place you knew, how well do you feel she evokes its distinctiveness in this book?

Did you have particular expectations of Alaska, particular things you knew about it before you started reading? And were your prejudices confirmed by this book or did your understanding change?

One of the ways the author uses the place is to contrast what might seem like an epic, big, dramatic backdrop with intimate personal stories – can you think of examples of how this might work?

Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock used to work as a journalist – what do you think talking about this place in a *fiction* allowed her to do with it that’s different?

THE CHARACTERS

What do the four principle characters have in common?

They’re different, too, of course – how much difference is there between their voices?

Ruth’s grandmother is a strong presence throughout – but does your view of her change over the course of the book?

Most of the secondary character in the book are adults – do you think our protagonists are well supported by the adult world around them? Is the adult world generally sympathetic?

FAMILIES

Each of our protagonists has a quite different experience of what it means to be part of a family – and it doesn’t always mean being raised by two parents, and it doesn’t even necessarily mean being close to any blood relatives at all. Why do you think showing these different kinds of family is important in the book?



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Do the characters' own feelings about what "family" means change over the course of their stories?

CONNECTIONS

The interconnectedness of the characters' respective stories isn't all clear from the outset – did you like the way you had to piece it together as you went?

Does the book in general have something to say about our own experiences of the world, our own interconnectedness with others as we live our own individual stories?

Seemingly insignificant objects are sometimes the connection between different characters' strands of the story – can you think of any examples?

There's quite a neat resolution of the stories at the end – did it work for you?

THE SMELL OF OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES

The Smell of Other People's Houses – a good title? (What makes a good title, do you think?)

Smell is key to the story – can you think of a few instances where there are significant evocations of smell that have some effect on the characters?

All four main characters have different problems with home – but what does "home" mean to each of them?

COMING OF AGE

This is a "coming of age" story – so how have each of the four protagonists changed by the end?

How much of these changes have been to do with their own choices, their own ability to make decisions for themselves in their lives?

Why do you think the author structured the novel into sections that follow the seasons of the year? Does it work well?

Some people have commented that Alaska itself (almost a character in its own right) is coming of age in this book – how might this be so?

AND FINALLY...

Does this Carnegie-shortlisted book deserve to win? Why, or why not?



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