

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

# THE WAR BEGINS IN PARIS

By Theodore Wheeler

Spoiler Alert: Discussion questions to be read after finishing the novel

1. The opening chapter of the book tells us that this is “a story of two women.” Once Mielle and Jane meet, they quickly become friends and experience a relationship deeper than that of a passing friendship. Why do you think Mielle and Jane are so drawn to each other? Beyond Jane coming up with the name Mielle, could there be a “Mielle” without Jane?
2. At the beginning of *The War Begins in Paris*, in 1938, radio broadcasts evolve from a technology through which people get news and entertainment into a medium for political parties to energize their base and proselytize converts. Over the course of the novel, how do you see this technology change the world? What new technologies in your lifetime have led to similar sea changes in culture, politics, and society?
3. *The War Begins in Paris* often plays with the idea of celebrity. In what ways is celebrity used to grant an air of validity and style to the news and political ideology of the time? In what ways do you see celebrity as a political force in our own time? Do you see this as a destructive or beneficial phenomenon?
4. *The War Begins in Paris* features excerpts from actual reporting published by William L. Shirer, Dorothy Thompson, and Edward R. Murrow. Did these dispatches enhance or detract from your experience of reading the book? Does it make you want to learn more about journalists from this period?
5. The book also includes fictionalized versions of several historical figures, most notably Jane Anderson, but also Joseph Goebbels, Emil Jannings, and even minor functionaries like Anton Winkelkemper. What do you think of the inclusion of real historical figures in the novel’s story? Who do you find more interesting: the characters based on real people or the purely fictional characters? Why do you think that is?

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

# THE WAR BEGINS IN PARIS

By Theodore Wheeler

Spoiler Alert: Discussion questions to be read after finishing the novel

6. Are there any settings in the novel that are close to your heart? Paris? Berlin? The Rhine Valley? Has reading this novel changed how you think about these places and their histories?
7. Mielle's upbringing as a Mennonite is an inescapable part of who she was a child and who she becomes as an adult. Seeing where Mielle ends up by the end of the novel, and after everything she's done, do you think she betrays the religious and moral philosophy by which she was raised? Why or why not?
8. In the epilogue, Jane taunts Mielle by asking her about what happened when they were separated in Stuttgart: "Do you regret it? Or is your conscience clear because he was only a Fascist?" What do you think Jane means by this statement? Do you think it's reasonable to challenge the idea of righteous killing?
9. There are multiple instances of split or merging personas in the novel. The dual identity of Mielle and Marthe Hess; Mielle feeling like she and Jane merge into one person right before she is afflicted with her fateful vision in La Closerie des Lilas; the uncanny resemblance shared by Anton Winkelkemper, Nilo Steffen, and Inspector Klaas. What is the meaning of these instances of doubling and doppelgängers?
10. Do you believe that Mielle's visions are actual phenomena that she experiences? If not, then what are they?
11. Have you ever experienced a second sight that foretold a future event? Did you believe or worry that the vision was legitimate at the time? How did that turn out?