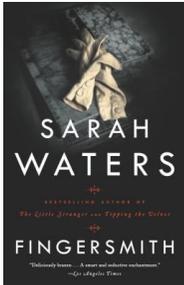


# Books by the Stack



## **Fingersmith by Sarah Waters**

Growing up as a foster child among a family of thieves, orphan Sue Trinder hopes to pay back that kindness by playing a key role in a swindle scheme devised by their leader, Gentleman, who is planning to con a fortune out of the naive Maud Lily, but Sue's growing pity for their helpless victim could destroy the plot.

**Why you'll like it:** *Suspenseful. Intricately-plotted. Atmospheric.*

**About the Author:** Sarah Waters was born in Wales in 1966. She has a Ph.D. in English. She is the author of several books including *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity*, *The Night Watch*, and *The Paying Guests*. *Fingersmith* won the CWA Ellis Peters Dagger Award for Historical Crime Fiction and the South Bank Show Award for Literature. She has won a Betty Trask Award and the Somerset Maugham Award. In 2003, she was chosen as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists and was named Author of the Year by the British Book Awards, The Booksellers' Association and Waterstone's Booksellers. Several of her novels have been adapted for television. (Bowker Author Biography)

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. At the start of her story, Sue Trinder claims: "I was Mrs. Sucksby's child, if I was anyone's." Is this true/ Why or why not? Might she still make the same claim by the end of her saga?
2. "Everything that came into our kitchen looking like one sort of thing, was made to leave it again looking quite another," Sue says of Mrs. Sucksby's kitchen (p. 10). At Briar, she finds unbearable "two-facedness" on the part of the servants, "all on the dodge in one way or another." (p. 83) Compare and contrast the two households. In what ways does each reinforce the activities of its inhabitants?
3. Deceptive appearances are a recurring theme throughout the novel. Is anything about Maud what it seems to be? What about Gentleman? Mr. Lilly? Why do you think the author chose to come at the story twice, from two separate points of view? Is Sue's perception of the situation more or less "real" than Maud's? Why or why not?
4. Sue and Maud initially appear to be almost perfect opposites: where Sue's hands are toughened by work, Maud's are smooth and childlike; where Sue is illiterate, Maud does nothing but pour over books. In what ways to the scale and nature of their differences change as the novel progresses? In what ways have they grown alike by the end of their story? How are they different?
5. Sue and Maud's relationship progresses through many incarnations. Discuss the manifestations of their relationship: how do they fulfill and surpass their roles and villain and victim? Servant and master? Caretaker and dependent? How do their transitions alter their destiny?
6. What effect has her occupation in her uncle's library had on Maud's psyche? Is she capable of

distinguishing between the content of the books and her own sexuality? What does her brutal treatment of Agnes indicate? How has she evolved by the time she returns to Briar at the end of the novel?

**7.** Sue's imprisonment in the asylum echoes Maud's incarceration at Lant Street, as well as her earlier situation at Briar. Discuss the ways in which gender and constraint are demonstrated – and challenged – in their respective characters. In what ways is the desire for “rare and sinister liberty” (p. 210) at the heart of both Maud and Sue's actions?

**8.** Do you think Sue's recollection of her earliest memory (“I remember seeing...how the world was made up: that it had bad Bill Sykeses in it, and good Mr. Ibbeses; and Nancys, that might go either way. I thought how glad I was that I was already on the side that Nancy got to at last. - I mean, the good side, with sugar mice in.”) would be altered by her experiences? In spite of all the deceptions she has undergone, does she still regard “good” and “bad” so clearly? Why or why not?

**9.** What does this novel ultimately say about the relationship between morality and love?

*(Questions provided by readinggroupguides.com)*



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