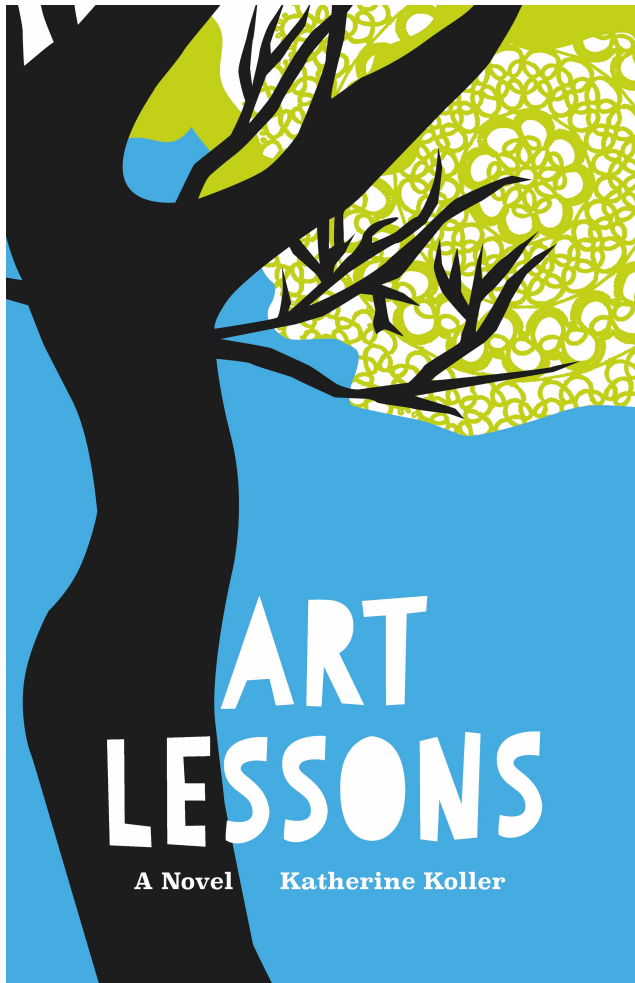


Bookclub Guide for *Art Lessons* by Katherine Koller



Art Lessons with my Mother-Daughter Book Club by Katherine Koller

I asked my mother-daughter book club to be my focus group for my novel manuscript, *Art Lessons*. I gave each of our eight mother-daughter pairs a bound photocopy and asked them to write all over it, with any questions or comments of any kind. At the meeting, I was nervous, even though I'd been writing professionally for the last twenty years! But these were my book club girls and moms. We'd been through six whole years of reading excellent books. This was my third mother-daughter book club, with my sixth daughter. But *Art Lessons* was my first novel.

In our book club format, questions travel around the circle, so everyone gets a chance to answer. I took notes. Lots and lots of notes. The girls and moms offered differing opinions, the same as all our past discussions. I listened carefully to the requests from girls to know more about any one character, and made sure to expand when I went back to rewrite. Girls asked about the

characters; moms tended to question details, like how to pronounce Babci (Bab-chi), a Polish word for grandma. Both groups liked the lists in the book.

Because my main character Cassie grows from 7 to 18, her voice changes. The girls loved that they sometimes knew more than Cassie, especially when she's younger than them. One mom said, "like nothing I've read before," and another described the novel as a "portrait of the artist as a young girl in layers." Everyone "could see" Cassie's drawings from her descriptions. From our book club discussion, I decided that *Art Lessons* appealed to both teens and adults.

For our book club, the host girl gets to serve snacks from the book. In *Art Lessons*, there are many possibilities, from "girl-cheese" sandwiches, pickles and hardboiled eggs to apple cake, ice cream and Polish pastries. The fun part is discovering them and making a selection.

Some questions for discussion about *Art Lessons*:

How does Cassie's Polish grandmother, Babci, influence Cassie's art?

Have you ever felt like Cassie when she's "floating"? How and when?

Which of Cassie's unlikely "teachers" did you like best? Why?

How would you feel if you, like Cassie, were sent away for a whole summer?

Which of Cassie's drawings do you like the most, and why?

I wrote the book to show the development of a girl as an artist, how she observes the world and transforms it to art, how it affects others and herself. I have six daughters, all who are artists in their own way: musician, painter, designer, dancer, singer, photographer. I've dedicated the novel to them!

Art Lessons is published as crossover fiction for 14 and up and adult audiences by Great Plains Publishing <http://www.greatplains.mb.ca/>. Hear Katherine read "Tree Day" from *Art Lessons* at Art Lessons Chapter Preview, www.katherinekoller.ca To learn more about mother-daughter bookclubs, download Katherine's "Moms and Girls who Read Together" at Books>Art Lessons on her website.

Katherine Koller writes for stage, screen and page. Her trilogy of Alberta Landworks plays includes *Last Chance Leduc*, *The Seed Savers* and *Coal Valley*. Her six-part web documentary, *Sustainable Me*, features Edmonton youth changing their world. Katherine's short fiction has appeared in *Alberta Views*, *Room*, *Epiphany*, *Polish(ed)* and *Grain*. *Art Lessons* is her first novel. It has been shortlisted for the Robert Kroetsch Edmonton Book Prize, the Alberta Readers' Choice Award and the Exporting Alberta Award.

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