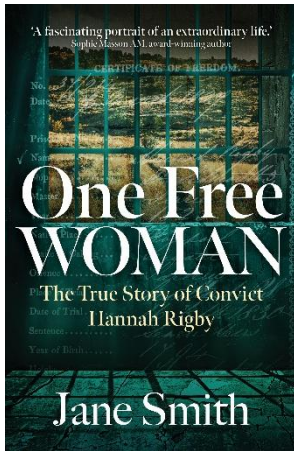

ONE FREE WOMAN *by* JANE SMITH

Book Club Questions



Hannah Rigby was a poor Liverpool seamstress, a prisoner and a serial thief. Exiled from her homeland, oppressed by poverty and rigid social mores, used and discarded by a series of men. An “exemplary” servant who was fond of a lark – and a single mother determined to keep her family together.

One Free Woman tells the compelling true story of the only female convict to stay in Moreton Bay when the penal settlement closed – a woman who notoriously served three separate sentences of transportation, including two at one of the harshest establishments in the country.

It is a heartbreaking and sensitively told story of a life that was typical of many women of the time struggling against poverty and gender inequality – women whose voices throughout history have seldom been heard.

“A fascinating portrait of an extraordinary life.”

– Sophie Masson AM, award-winning author.

For more information on the book or the author, visit:

www.janesmithauthor.com

1. Do you think Hannah’s misfortunes were the result of bad luck or foolishness?
 2. In the early 19th century, public opinion was divided on the best way to deal with crime. Some thought transportation wasn’t punitive enough, because some convicts ended up having better lives in Australia than they might have had in the UK. Others opposed transportation because they thought it was cruel to tear people away from their homes and families. What do you think: too lenient, too harsh, or a good solution? Do you think punishment works as a deterrent?
 3. In our attitudes to crime and punishment today, how far do you think we’ve come since 1821, when Hannah was convicted?
 4. Some have speculated that Hannah reoffended deliberately in 1837 so she could be reunited with her youngest son James in Moreton Bay. If that’s true, she must have had to choose to give up her two older boys. Do you think it was a deliberate choice? If so, do you think it was the right choice for her? What would you have done in her situation?
 5. What do you think of Samuel Marsden’s ‘marriage market’ at the Parramatta Female Factory? If you were a convict held there, would you have considered taking a chance on marriage in this way?
 6. Why do you think we have so few published stories about convict women?
 7. What do you think of Robert Crawford? James Hexton? Joseph Barrow?
 8. In the 19th century, people often judged women who committed crimes more harshly than they judged the men. Why do you think that is? Do you think this view has changed? Why?
 9. What do you think of James Hexton taking his Quandamooka son away from his mother to be brought up by the Petrie family? How do you think the Petries should have responded to the request?
 10. Historical records can tell us a lot about events, but often they don’t reveal much about people’s feelings or motivations. Fictionalising history is one way some authors prefer to bring historical stories to life. Do you prefer to read historical stories as non-fiction or fiction? Why? When do you think non-fiction is more appropriate than fiction?
 11. If Hannah were living in modern times, what do you think her life would be like?
 12. What do you think of Hannah as a person? Do you think you would have liked her?
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