

# Book Club Q & A: The Incident at Montebello

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1. In the opening chapter, the driver of the car, the Italian Premier Benito Mussolini, runs over and kills a child. Afterward, he is quoted as saying, "What's one life in the affairs of a State?" What does this statement reveal about Mussolini's character and beliefs?
2. The political prisoner Elio Sardolini arrives in Montebello to serve out his sentence for his anti-Fascist activities. Were you surprised to learn that exiling prisoners to remote parts of Italy was a practice in Fascist Italy? What observations about Montebello and its people does Sardolini make that interest and surprise you?
3. When Sardolini meets Lucia at the tailor shop for the first time, he comments on the 3 pictures above the cash register. Lucia tells him that President Herbert Hoover, Benito Mussolini, and her father-in-law are her husband's saints, but not hers. This moment foreshadows the political conflict between Lucia and her husband. Do you think their political differences are the main reasons why they ultimately separate or do other factors (like Lucia's love for Sardolini) play an equally important role?
4. At the end of Chapter 11, Sardolini and Lucia meet by accident in the graveyard. Nonna Angelina sees them talking and treats Sardolini with great coldness. From this moment forward, Nonna Angelina is suspicious of Lucia's relationship with Sardolini and becomes convinced that Lucia is unfaithful. Why do you think Nonna Angelina dislikes Lucia so much? How much does she influence Donato in the break up of his marriage?
5. In Part 2 of the book, Isolina learns several surprising things about Rodi, the priest, Donato, Lucia, the midwife, and her parents. How does this new knowledge change her and her attitudes?
6. One of the major themes of the book is what Hannah Arendt calls "bureaucratic evil." This is illustrated by the Fascists who introduce a new kind of evil, which requires total allegiance in mind, body, and soul, and in the character Donato, who must make greater and greater moral compromises. The justification Donato often uses is that he is doing what is best for the family. He says this to justify stealing money from his boss and betraying Rodi to the police. Do you believe him? Do you think he believes his own justifications? Why or why not?

7. Another theme in the book is the difficulty of recognizing evil. This is illustrated by Isolina who starts to recognize evil in her own father, and by Lucia who sees it in her own husband. What are some of the reasons why it might be so difficult to recognize evil—both in one's own family and in the larger society?
  
8. At the end of the book, Lucia and Isolina learn that Elio Sardolini is alive and will come to America as soon as he can. Can you imagine what their reunion will be like? Do you think Lucia and Sardolini will get married and live together in Boston? How will Lucia's children feel about Sardolini's return? Will Nietta be resentful of Sardolini because she still loves her father?