



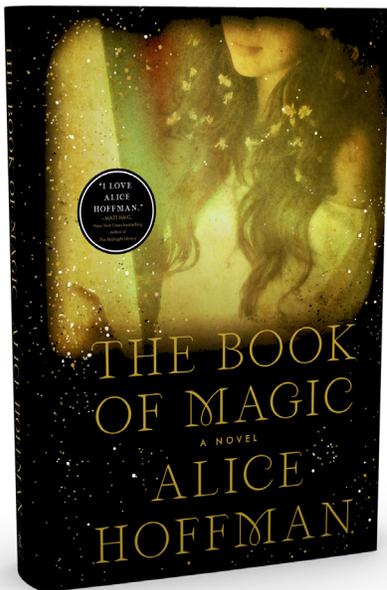
THE BOOK
OF MAGIC

A NOVEL

ALICE
HOFFMAN

A SIMON & SCHUSTER
READING GROUP GUIDE





This reading group guide for *The Book of Magic* includes an introduction, discussion questions, ideas for enhancing your book club, and a Q&A with author Alice Hoffman. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

Master storyteller Alice Hoffman brings us the conclusion of the Practical Magic series in a spellbinding and enchanting final Owens novel brimming with lyric beauty and vivid characters.

The Owens family has been cursed in matters of love for more than three hundred years, but all of that is about to change. The novel begins in a library, the best place for a story to be conjured, when beloved aunt Jet Owens hears the deathwatch beetle and knows she has only seven days to live. Jet is not the only one in danger—the curse is already at work.

A frantic attempt to save a young man's life spurs three generations of the Owens women, and one long-lost brother, to use their unusual gifts to break the curse as they travel from Paris to London to the English countryside where their ancestor Maria Owens first practiced the Unnamed Art. The younger generation discovers secrets that have been hidden from them in matters of both magic and love by Sally, their fiercely protective mother. As Kylie Owens uncovers the truth about who she is and what her own dark powers are, her aunt Franny comes to understand that she is ready to sacrifice everything for her family, and Sally Owens realizes that she is willing to give up everything for love.

The Book of Magic is a breathtaking conclusion that celebrates mothers and daughters, sisters and brothers, and anyone who has ever been in love.

Topics & Questions for Discussion

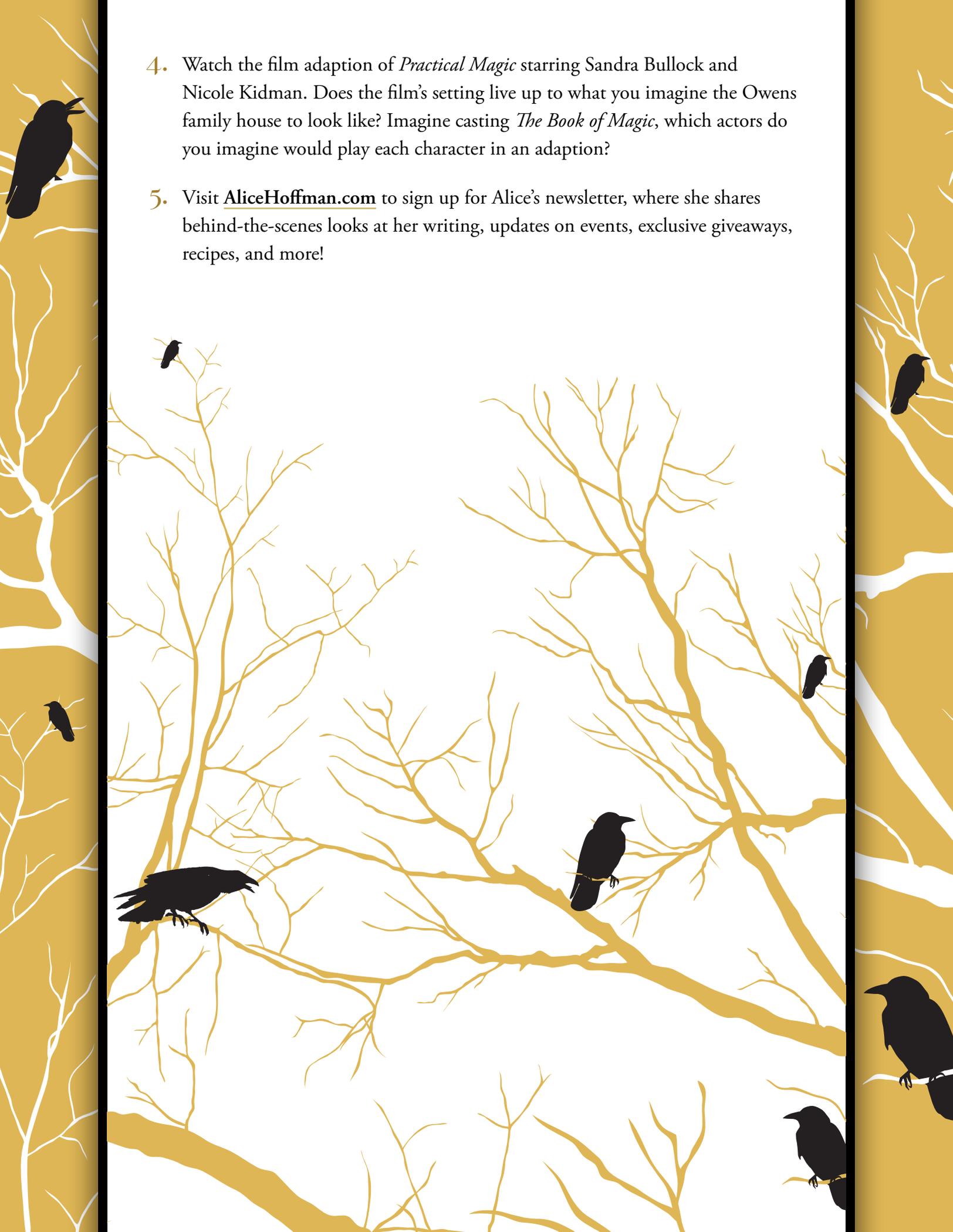
1. Centuries before the events in *The Book of Magic*, the Owens family matriarch, Maria Owens, invoked an enchantment meant to protect generations of her family to come. Discuss how the generations within *The Book of Magic* each deal with the curse and its restrictions. What other legacies did her family inherit?
2. *The Book of Magic* is both contemporary fiction and magical realism. How does Alice Hoffman blend both genres? What are examples from each genre in the book?
3. Libraries play a critical role throughout the novel, and the Owens children were taught to find their way to a library if they were ever lost. What are some libraries, literal or otherwise, which have been havens for you? What do you seek out when feeling lost?
4. Sally is fiercely protective of her daughters, and keeps the truth of their magical inheritance and Maria's curse from them. Do you think Sally had a right to keep the truth from her daughters? How does Sally evolve throughout the novel?
5. A few of the characters have a particular talent when it comes to their magical gifts, Vincent, for example, is a finder, and Kylie can see auras. Consider all the specialized talents detailed throughout the novel. Is one more valuable than another? If you could choose to have a particular ability, which would it be and why?
6. Antonia is a scientist and the most logical of all the Owens women. How does she fit into the rest of the family? What was the significance of having her unlock the secret to breaking the curse?
7. In one of Jet's last messages before passing on she writes, "Everything worthwhile is dangerous." What does she mean by this? Do you consider this a warning or encouragement?
8. Another piece of advice Jet leaves for Kylie, and one which is invoked by others throughout the novel, is to trust no one. How is this advice valuable? Was it ever detrimental?
9. Baking is used throughout the novel as its own form of magic, one that attracts goodwill and loved ones. Margaret welcomes her son home with favorites like ploughman's pasties and ginger pudding, while the Owens make pies to draw Kylie to them. What other food and drink play a role in the novel? How does the novel's fare affect the characters and their relationships? Do you have any recipes which act as magic in your own home or family?

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10. Consider Tom and Ian; both were exposed to the “Crooked Path” early in life, each with drastically different outcomes. What else is similar about these two men? Discuss what led to their contrasting conclusions.
 11. One of the family traditions is making Chocolate Topsy Cake. (At one point Franny even says, “If you can’t eat chocolate cake for breakfast, what is the point of being alive?”) What other traditions are mentioned throughout the novel? Share your own family or community’s traditions with the group.
 12. “Ian was covered with ink, nineteen tattoos in all, and every one told a story.” Do you have any tattoos? If you’re comfortable doing so, share the story or inspiration behind them, or whether you’ve ever considered getting a tattoo. What would you have inked if you decided to get one?
 13. “Love was inside every story,” Franny thinks toward the end of the novel. Discuss the different ways and different types—familial, romantic, mania, etc.—of love in this book and how it shaped the story.

Enhance Your Book Club

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1. *The Book of Magic* begins and ends in a library, and Alice Hoffman references many book titles throughout the novel. Check out the list of referenced titles after the final chapter and discuss which of them are familiar. Does anyone have a favorite? Are you planning to read one or more on the list? Make a list of your own favorite books and share them with the group.
 2. Although each novel can be read on their own, *The Book of Magic* is a culmination of a series which first introduced characters in *Practical Magic*. Split up the other novels in the series (*Practical Magic* and its prequels, *The Rules of Magic* and *Magic Lessons*) among the group and go around presenting a case for which novel your group should read together next. If you’ve already read them, discuss the themes which are carried throughout the novels or craft your own story about the next (or a past!) Owens generation.
 3. On both sides of the Atlantic, Antonia, Sally, and Gillian make “Lost Daughter” pies to draw Kylie to them. Search for a recipe and try making your own pie, apple or another favorite fruit, to enjoy with a pot of tea.
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4. Watch the film adaptation of *Practical Magic* starring Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman. Does the film's setting live up to what you imagine the Owens family house to look like? Imagine casting *The Book of Magic*, which actors do you imagine would play each character in an adaptation?
5. Visit AliceHoffman.com to sign up for Alice's newsletter, where she shares behind-the-scenes looks at her writing, updates on events, exclusive giveaways, recipes, and more!





A Conversation with **ALICE HOFFMAN**

Q: You've said in previous interviews that you always start writing with a question in mind. What was the question that you asked before writing this book, and did you find your answer?

AH: My question was, what is the end of the story for the Owens family? I found many of my answers, and there was closure, but I realized that when I finished writing, their stories will continue as they move into the future.

Q: *The Book of Magic* is rich with details in its setting, enchantments, and historical references, especially as the characters traveled to different cities. What was the process behind your research? Have you spent any time in the locations described in the novel?

AH: My research process is usually to do an initial amount of research and begin to create a world for the characters to move into. I have visited many of the places in the book, but some of them I only know through the characters travels.

Q: Jet leaves a note with a reminder to Vincent saying, "Live a lot," which is a phrase repeated by other Owens family members throughout the novel. Does this advice have any real-life inspiration? Do you have any pieces of advice that you consider in your day-to-day life, or advice for any aspiring writers?

AH: I think this is good advice for everyone. It's a reminder that we only live once. My advice for aspiring writers is to keep writing!



Q: Witches and familiars traditionally go hand in hand, and there's a line from *The Book of Magic* saying, "When you had a familiar you had a soul mate." Can you tell us about an animal that has been special in your life?

AH: I have had many animals that have been special to me, but the one I was closest to was a German Shepherd dog named Houdini, whom I still miss every day.

Q: "The best stories begin in a library." How have libraries played a role in your life? Do you have any special memories from libraries?

AH: Libraries completely changed my life. When I was growing up, I became a huge reader, and I am still grateful for the Malverne Public Library which allowed me to have a library card even though I didn't live in that town.

Q: Do you ever have chocolate cake for breakfast?

AH: Whenever possible!

Q: By the end of *The Book of Magic*, readers have met new Owens family members and said goodbye to others. Did you know where each of the characters would end up when you began writing? Were there any whose journeys surprised you while the novel came together?

AH: I always think that I know how a character's journey will end, and I am always surprised. *The Book of Magic* surprised me every day, and that was part of the pleasure of writing it.

Q: Do you have a favorite line from *The Book of Magic*?

AH: My favorite line is the first line of the novel, "Some stories begin at the beginning and others begin at the end, but all the best stories begin in a library."

Q: The detailed historical note about Amelia Bassano at the end of the book is fascinating! How were you inspired to incorporate a true historical figure? Are there any parallels between Amelia and characters in *The Book of Magic*?

AH: Amelia Bassano was the first woman to publish a book of poems in the United Kingdom. She is the author of the imaginary Grimoire that is discovered by the Owens family in *Magic Lessons*. I think she reflects the difficulties that women who have ambition face and those who may be viewed as different.

Q: You've written more than thirty novels. Where do you find your inspiration? Is there a moment when you know a story is ready to be written, or will become a novel?

AH: I find my inspiration in different places. Sometimes in a museum as I did with *The Marriage of Opposites*, sometimes while traveling which happened with *The World*



That We Knew, and sometimes I am lucky and a story just presents itself to me as it did with *Practical Magic*, the first book in the Practical Magic series.

Q: What have you learned from these characters since first imagining them more than twenty-five years ago? What do you hope readers will take away from the Owens family?

AH: I have learned that love is the only thing that matters, and I hope that my readers take that message to heart.

Q: Can you tell us what you're working on now?

AH: I don't like to talk about a book until a book is ready to be published. I can only say that the book I am working on now happens in ancient times, centered on a woman who wasn't able to tell her own story.

