

## About the Author

Karen Fowler's parents were long-time California residents until they moved to Bloomington, Indiana, where Karen's father took a job as a psychology professor at the University of Indiana. Fowler was born in Bloomington in 1950 and lived there for eleven years. Her father then jumped at the chance to return to California and took a job with Encyclopedia Britannica. The family moved to Palo Alto. Fowler attended Berkeley, where she became an antiwar activist and met her husband. Fowler earned a degree in Political Science, but had no clear sense of what she wanted to do with it, so she and her husband entered graduate school at UC-Davis. The couple had their first child during Fowler's last semester of graduate school. She had another child two years later, and spent the rest of her twenties raising the children. When she turned thirty, though, she felt an itch to do more, and enrolled in dance and later creative writing classes at the university.

Her first novel, *Sarah Canary* (1991), is a sort of historical fantasy about the adventures that ensue when a woman who speaks only nonsense wanders into a railroad camp of Chinese workers in 1873 America. Her second novel was a more straightforward historical romance called *The Sweetheart Season* (1996). Fowler's most successful novel to date has been her most recent. *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004) tells the story — as its title suggests — of a six-person book club that gathers each month to discuss one of Jane Austen's novels. As the club meets, their personal stories and group interactions start taking on the tone of an Austen novel until, in the end, everyone finds themselves either dating or married, much to their surprise.

(*NoveList.com*)

## Author Interview by Clinton Lawrence

**Lawrence:** In *The Jane Austen Book Club*, one of your characters, Grigg, reads science fiction and goes to science fiction conventions, and the other members are somewhat shocked at first when they discover this. Do you still feel there is still a big divide between mainstream fiction and science fiction?

**Fowler:** Not in terms of the literature itself, and not even really in terms of the reading experience, but absolutely in terms of the communities, and how people see themselves as readers. I think that there are still a great many people who wouldn't seek out or pick up a book if it were in the science fiction section of the book store, but if it were shelved somewhere else, and they picked it up and read it, and nobody had told them that it was science fiction, they'd have no problem. They've read *Beloved* and *The Lovely Bones*. People have become very comfortable with fantastical literature, which seems to be shelved all over the place now. But if you ask them to read science fiction, they would balk.

One of the things that I was thinking about in the Jane Austen novel was how very, very many science fiction writers that I know love Jane Austen, and read her with many of the same protocols that they read science fiction. It's a strange world they're trying to make sense of, it's a kind of world-building exercise to read a historical novel of that sort, so they're trained to do that, bring the same tools to that, and really enjoy it. But it seemed to me, although I don't know -- maybe someday, we'll be able to ask -- that it's very unlikely it works the other way, that if you went to the Jane Austen Society, and asked how many people love science fiction, you wouldn't get a huge show of hands.

([strangehorizons.com](http://strangehorizons.com))

## Reviews

"Book clubs are the built-in audience for this novel, as is anyone who can relish the love life of women old enough to remember wearing white cotton gloves. For anyone who savors Austen's books or appreciates a multilayered reading experience, *The Jane Austen Book Club* is more than suitable." - [usatoday.com](http://usatoday.com)

"On its surface, *The Jane Austen Book Club* is a tidy number, a perfectly cut and polished little gem with just enough facets. But that's not the half of it. This exquisite novel is bigger and more ambitious than it appears. It's that rare book that reminds us what reading is all about." - [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com)

## Movie Adaptation

*The Jane Austen Book Club* is 2007 romantic drama film directed Robin Swicord, who also adapted the screenplay from the 2004 novel of the same name which was written by Karen Joy Fowler. The film stars Maria Bello, Emily Blunt, Kathy Baker, Amy Brenneman, Maggie Grace, and Jimmy Smits, and is about six people from California who form a book club to discuss Jane Austen novels. The film premiered September 9, 2007 at the Toronto International Film Festival. It was rated PG-13 by the MPAA "for mature thematic material, sexual content, brief strong language and some drug use."

([bookrags.com](http://bookrags.com))

## Movie Reviews

A surprisingly successful, un-Hallmark-ified take on the traditional chick flick.-Bob Mondello - [npr.org](http://npr.org)

*The Jane Austen Book Club* is both a testament to Austen's continued relevance and a fine example of classroom particulars converted into entertaining banter without losing any oomph. –Brandon Fibbs -*Colorado Springs Gazette*

THIS beautifully acted story is, underneath it all, a fairly formulaic chick flick.-*Sun Online*

([rottentomatoes.com](http://rottentomatoes.com))

## Further Reading

*Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding

*Le Mariage* by Diane Johnson

*Such a Girl* by Karen Siplin

*Pride and Prescience: Or, a Truth Universally Acknowledged* by Carrie Bebris

**BOOK CLUB TO GO!**  
**The Jane Austen Book Club**  
**By Karen Joy Fowler**

**Possible Discussion Questions**

1. The author opens the novel with a quote from Jane Austen, part of which reads, "Seldom, very seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure." Do you agree with this sentiment? Why do you think the author chooses to open the novel with this quote? How might this statement apply to each of the characters in the book?
2. How does each person "read" Austen? Are these readings all valid?
3. Who is the "we" narrating the group sections of the book? How does this voice affect the story?
4. What echoes of Austen are found in the book?
5. Are Austen's "lessons" about love and marriage unrealistic or old-fashioned?
6. Does the book club ever criticize Austen?
7. When the group is first being formed, Bernadette suggests that it should consist exclusively of women: "The dynamic changes with men. They pontificate rather than communicate. They talk more than their share." (page 3). What do you think of her statement? How does Grigg affect the group's dynamic? How would things have been different without him?
8. On page 228 Sylvia asks, "Why should unhappiness be so much more powerful than happiness?" How would you answer her? How does each character find her/his own happiness in the novel?
9. Are love and marriage only interesting in books?
10. The book club meets from March through August. How does the group change over these six months? "I always like to know how a story ends," Bernadette says on page 199. How do you think this story ends (the "epilogue to the epilogue")? Does Bernadette have a happy marriage with Senor Obando? Do Allegra and Corinne stay together? How about Jocelyn and Grigg? Daniel and Sylvia?