

TRESPASSERS AT THE GOLDEN GATE

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal certain aspects of the storyline of this book. If you have not finished reading *Trespassers at the Golden Gate*, we respectfully suggest that you do so before reviewing this guide.

1. How does the book portray the relationship between Alexander Parker Crittenden and Laura Fair? Do you think they truly loved each other, or was their relationship based on something else?
2. How do the depictions of Clara Crittenden and Laura Fair serve to contrast different ideals of womanhood during the Gilded Age? How did Laura Fair's multiple marriages and divorces reflect the changing attitudes toward marriage and women's independence?
3. How does understanding the social and political history of San Francisco and California help you better understand the times during which the crime is committed?
4. How did the economic boom and bust cycles of San Francisco influence the actions and decisions of the players of the day? How did the completion of the transcontinental railroad change their fortunes?
5. The book touches on issues of race and ethnicity, particularly in the context of San Francisco's diverse population. How are these issues addressed in the narrative, and what challenges do people like Mary Ellen Pleasant and Ah Toy face?
6. How do newspapers and public opinion shape the events of the day and, indeed, the lives of the Crittendens and Mrs. Fair? Does the press of today differ all that much from the Gilded Age?
7. Suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton said "the Mrs. Fairs [of the world] are the product of man's moral code and not of the suffrage movement." What do you think she meant by that? And do you think Laura Fair is entirely to blame for her actions?
8. Talk about the peripheral figures in *Trespassers at the Golden Gate*—Mark Twain, Mary Ellen Pleasant, Ah Toy, Bret Harte, et al. How do their stories reflect or comment on the main themes of the book?
9. In what ways did the trial of Laura Fair reflect broader societal anxieties about gender, morality, and social order during the Gilded Age?
10. What did you think of the outcome of the second trial? Do you think justice was ultimately served? Did it need to be?
11. How does this compare to other true crime stories you've read? What elements kept the pages turning for you?