

READING GROUP GUIDE

THE CHRISTMAS BOX

by Richard Paul Evans

1. What is the significance of the ornately carved wooden box that Richard finds in the attic of MaryAnne Parkin's home? Which, if any, of the various explanations Richard Paul Evans offers for the source of the box's magic has particular appeal for you? Do you think it is important that a reader believe in the magic of the box in order to experience the full emotional and spiritual impact of the story? Why or why not?
2. In what sense is the story of *The Christmas Box* allegorical? What is the central message of the story? In what ways did you find that message meaningful for your own life? Why does it become a matter of such urgency for Mary that Richard understand what the first gift of Christmas was?
3. The #1 bestseller in the nation when it was first published, *The Christmas Box* has become a modern Christmas classic, selling more than seven million copies in 17 languages worldwide, and inspiring an award-winning CBS television movie starring Maureen O'Hara and Richard Thomas. Why do you think *The Christmas Box* has become so hugely popular? How do you think it compares with other classic Christmas stories?
4. Asked to tell which of the senses she most identifies with Christmas, Mary points to the sounds of the Yuletide season, while for Richard it is the sense of smell. Which of the senses do you think is most affected by Christmas and why? Are any of your senses more acute than the others? If you were to lose one of your senses, which do you think would be the most difficult to do without? Which one would be the easiest? How do the various senses stir your memories of childhood or other important moments in your past?
5. The author explains to the reader that he believes in angels, "though not the picture-book kind with wings and harps." What kind of angels does Evans believe in and what function do they serve in

The Christmas Box? What is the meaning of the recurrent angel dreams that start haunting Richard's slumber once he moves into the Parkin home? Why does the angel that visits Richard in his dreams turn to stone? What role, if any, do angels play in your own life? Why do you think there has been such an explosion of interest in angels in our popular culture--from books and television shows about angels to angel motifs on a wide range of objects from jewelry to clothes?

6. Many of the events of *The Christmas Box* are shrouded in mystery. Why does Richard hear a lullaby in the middle of the night that seems to be emanating from the Christmas Box? How could the box play music without possessing any mechanism normally found in a music box? Why is Richard, a man who ordinarily wouldn't consider intruding on anyone's privacy, irresistibly drawn to read the letters contained in the Christmas Box? Why are the leaves of MaryAnne's Bible stained from tears--both dried tears from the past and moist ones that seem to have just been spilled? How do you account for these mysterious occurrences? Do you think they are meant to be interpreted literally or symbolically? Do they require a supernatural explanation?

7. As Mary lies in a hospital bed dying, why do the "gentle, sweet tones of the Christmas Box" fill the room? Why does Mary finally seem so at peace? How do you think Richard's life will change now that Mary has helped him to see that "in my quest for success in this world I had been trading diamonds for stones"? Talk about a transforming experience in your own life when you came to a realization that you were pursuing the wrong dreams. Have you ever read a book that inspired you to reorder your priorities? Why do you think so many readers of *The Christmas Box* have described it as a heartwarming story that not only touched their emotions but actually transformed their lives? Do you think the book will have such a transforming effect on you? Why or why not?

8. Why at the end of the book does Richard throw the letters from the Christmas Box into the fireplace and let the flames devour them one by one? What does Richard mean when he says, "it is the emptiness of the box that I will treasure most"? Is the box really empty?

9. *The Christmas Box* is the first novel in a trilogy that also includes the prequel, *Timepiece*, in which we discover the source of the wisdom that MaryAnne bequeaths to Richard; and the sequel, *The Letter*, in which David and MaryAnne Parkin face love's greatest challenge and discover its truest

meaning. When you enjoy a work of fiction do you often wish you could spend more time with the characters? Do you prefer that to be time in the past, or in the future? When reading a prequel, how does it affect your reading pleasure to step back in time to witness earlier events unfolding in characters' lives even though you already know what has happened? Were you inspired by *The Christmas Box* to read the other books in the trilogy? Why or why not?

10. Fans of Richard Paul Evans's books have often pointed to their multiple-hanky appeal. One captivated reader, sharing her opinion on the web, calls *The Christmas Box* trilogy "perfect to sit down and cry over." Why do you think so many people relish a book that gives the reader a good cry?

11. Before reading *The Christmas Box*, if you knew that *USA Today* expected the book to "tug families' heartstrings," would you have been more or less inclined to read it? Why? *The Daily Universe*, reviewing the final book in the trilogy, has said: "In a day when popular fiction often fails to inspire goodness...Evans's story manages to wrap warm hands around its readers, instilling in them a hunger for goodness to prevail." Do you think that the ability to inspire goodness is an appropriate standard by which to evaluate a book? Why or why not? The angel statue described in *The Christmas Box* has inspired the erection of similar angel monuments in cities across America, from Salt Lake City, Utah, to West Palm Beach, Florida, where parents who have lost a child can come to grieve and heal. Does knowing this change the way you feel about the book? How?

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