

The Couple Next Door Discussion Questions

by Shari Lapena

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Shari Lapena website)

Shari Lapena was a lawyer and English teacher before turning to writing fiction. She makes her home in Toronto. *The Couple Next Door* was her suspense debut.



Characters:

- **Anne Conti** – Married to Marco Conti and has a 6 month old daughter, Cora. Worked at an art gallery before becoming a stay at home mother. Has postpartum depression. Comes from a very rich family. Her parents are Alice and Rich Dries. Rich is Anne's stepfather.
- **Marco Conti** – Anne's husband and Cora's father. Owns his own software design firm which is in financial trouble. Comes from a middle class family. Marco has been independent and on his own since 18 years of age.
- **Ms. Beck** – Headmistress at St. Mildred's School, an exclusive private school, Anne attended K-12.
- **Mrs. Bleeker** – Anne's former English teacher.
- **Mrs Paula Dempsey** – Lives across the street from the Contis. Saw a small car driving on the lane behind the Conti's house with no headlights at 12:35 am – right around the time of the kidnapping.
- **Alice Dries** – Anne's mother. Comes from money. Married to Richard. Her first husband died of a heart attack when Anne was 4 years old.
- **Richard Dries** – Anne's stepfather. Controls the family money even though it is Alice's.
- **Detective Jenning** – Detective. Rashbach's partner. Investigating the Conti kidnapping.
- **Bruce Neeland** – Marco's friend/accomplice. Met on a park bench. His real name is Derek Honig.
- **Detective Rashbach** – Detective in charge of the Conti kidnapping.
- **Debbie Renzetti, Janice Foegle and Susan Givins** – Classic "Mean Girls" who went to school and bullied Anne, until Anne threw Debbie into a wall for tormenting her.
- **Cynthia Stillwell** – Anne's next door neighbor. Her row house shares a wall with the Contis. Married to Graham. Very beautiful. Enjoys a unconventional sex life. Was friends with Anne before the baby, but the relationship has become strained. Cynthia flirts with Marco during the dinner party.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. What is the title, "The Couple Next Door," meant to suggest?
3. This book is told from from multiple points of view. Was it well done? Was it effective? Why or why not?

4. The author wrote this story in present tense. Do you think the story being told in present tense hurt/helped with the suspense?
5. It's challenging to keep suspense readers at the edge of their seat, but not drag out the twist so long that they get antsy or feel manipulated. Do you think the author did a good job of setting the right pace for the plot to move along? Did you like the pacing of this book? Too fast, too slow, or just right?
6. Imagine yourself in Anne's position—would you have left your infant at home while going next door for dinner? Do you believe Anne is a good mother? How do you define that?
7. Do you think that mothers put undue pressure on themselves to be seen as “Good Moms?” Do you think that some women's need to be seen as “A Good Mom” can cause them to fail to get help when they need it? Is trying to be a “good mom” a contributing factor in this book?
8. The theme of leaving a child alone is a hot-button topic in the media. These incidents have inspired outrage in some, and understanding in others who can relate to making decisions that, in hindsight, were the worst possible decisions. How do you think the author was able to make Anne and Marco sympathetic enough that readers would empathize with them?
9. The press hound Anne and Marco, camping outside their door and assaulting them with questions. Do you think this type of media hype is justified in the name of “news”? Does excessive news coverage provide any type of benefit?
10. How do you think Anne's postpartum depression effected the book?
11. When the Contis get the first ransom, they decide not to involve the police. What would you do in that situation?
12. At one point, Anne doesn't know if she killed her own child. Do you believe she's capable of that? Why or why not? How horrible would it be not to know something like that?
13. Of all the people involved in the kidnapping, who do you think was the most guilty? The least?
14. Why does Anne stay with Marco, even after everything she's learned? Would you? Is it possible to build trust again after that type of betrayal?
15. What did you think about the ending of the book?
16. What do you think is going to ultimately happen to Anne? Cora? Marco?
17. Did you find yourself flip-flopping back and forth between Anne and Marco, siding with one, then the other? Who do you find yourself siding with the most?
18. Lapena has written four other novels. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Book Club Babble – <https://bookclubbabble.com/5-questions-to-ask-your-book-club-about-the-couple-next-door-by-shari-lapena/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/l/shari-lapena/>
- Shari Lapena – <http://www.sharilapena.com/bio/>
- Penguin Random House – <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/543892/the-couple-next-door-by-shari-lapena/9780525505310/readers-guide/>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=3&sid=d57744b7-2ca4-4a7a-a84c-f39841b0fe4f%40pdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZi#UI=10513264&db=neh>
- WH Smith – <https://blog.whsmith.co.uk/rjsu17-the-couple-next-door-shari-lapena/>

Shari Lapena Books

- Things Go Flying (2008)
- Happiness Economics (2011)
- The Couple Next Door (2016)
- A Stranger in the House (2017)
- An Unwanted Guest (2018)

If you liked The Couple Next Door, try...

- Missing Child – Patricia MacDonald
- Remember Mia – Alexandria Burt
- Chosen – Chandra Hoffman
- Watch Me Disappear – Janelle Brown
- Big Little Lies – Liane Moriarty