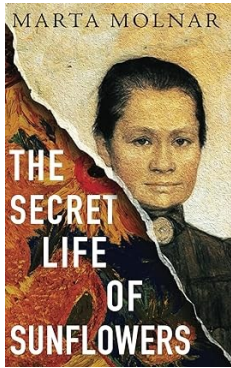




# Discussion Guide



## About the Book

The Secret Life of Sunflowers

Author: Marta Molnar

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## Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. How much did you know about Vincent Van Gogh before you read the book? How did this add to your knowledge?
3. We now think of Vincent as one of the greatest artists of all time, yet during his life he was rarely acknowledged. The life path of creatives can be lonely and frustrating. Have you experienced this in your life? If you are an artist, who encourages you to persist in your work?
4. What did you think of Johanna Bonger? How well does Molnar tell her story? What did you find amazing about her efforts? How did Emsley's story parallel Johanna's?
5. What role did mental illness play in Vincent's and his brother, Theo's lives? What happened to them at that time? Do you think they would have had better lives if they lived now, why or why not?
6. Both Jo and Emsley overcome difficulties. Have you ever done something that you didn't think you could do? What motivated you? What did you learn from it? How does it make you feel to think back to those times?
7. Molnar states that the theme of the book is inspiring women. Who are some women in your family or circle of friends that you admire? Why? Have you told them lately that you're proud of them or that they inspire you?
8. Drawing inspiration from Johanna, is there something that you'd like to do, something that would make a big difference in your life, but you aren't sure whether you can do it?
9. Read over the MAMs comments on this book. With whom do you agree/disagree and why?

## On YouTube

Watch: "The Woman Who Made Van Gogh Famous"

"The Secret Life of Sunflowers. A Tale of Art, Legacy, and Discovery Background Image Sunflowers" (Book Review)



**NANCY:** A riveting historical novel providing a window into the life of Vincent Van Gogh and his sister-in-law's determination to continue her husband's goal to let his work shine, interwoven with the life of a modern woman discovering a related family heirloom.



**ABIGAIL:** This novel gives us a look at the tragic way mental illness was treated in the past. Perhaps in our times, Van Gogh might have received better treatment and could have lived longer, to see his work widely acclaimed. Molnar does a great job telling the story of Johanna Bonar.



**SALLIE:** I loved the story of the widow Jo's son who made a difference in her life, pulling her out of her grief and depression, giving her a purpose. Kids do that. Reminds me of that book we read, *The 13th Gift*, where a woman's husband dies right before Christmas and her children helped her pull out of her depression, too.



**PRISCILLA:** What a sad story of love and loss. My heart breaks for Vincent, Theo and especially for Jo. What tragic lives they lived, but Jo was amazing in how she persisted, supporting herself and her son while engaging in a campaign to make Vincent known.



**MOLLY:** This book underscores the loneliness of the artist's life. So many artists haven't really been discovered until after they passed. I've been doing some writing, and though I have a few books up on Amazon, they haven't been discovered. I need a Johanna in my life, as do all artists!



**JANE:** I loved the focus on Jo. Wasn't she a splendid woman? She transcended the expectations of her time early on and continued to do so, rising above grief to bring Van Gogh's work to the world, while supporting herself and her son. Great book.



**KATHARINE:** I loved the history in this book. The author obviously did her homework, learning about the era, the contemporaries of Van Gogh, the art world at the time, and what life was like for women. I enjoyed the story and cheered for Jo all along the way.