

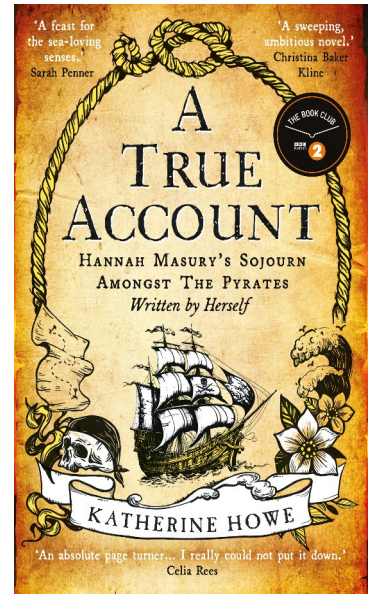
A True Account by Katherine Howe – Reading Group Questions

In Boston, as the Golden Age of Piracy comes to a bloody close, Hannah Masury – bound into service at a waterfront inn since childhood – is ready to take her life into her own hands. When William Fly is hanged for piracy in the town square, the teenage Hannah is watching. Forced to flee for her life, Hannah disguises herself as a cabin boy and joins the pitiless crew of another notorious real-life pirate, Edward "Ned" Low. To earn her freedom and finally change the tide of her own future, Hannah must hunt down William Fly's lost treasure.

Meanwhile in 1930, Professor Marian Beresford pieces this bewitching story together, seeing her own lack of freedom reflected back at her as she watches Hannah's transformation. At the centre of Hannah Masury's account, however, lies a centuries-old mystery that Marian is determined to solve. It soon becomes clear that Hannah was once just as determined to take this secret to her grave.

A True Account tells the unforgettable, interleaved stories of two women in different worlds, both shattering the rules of their own society, both daring to risk everything to go forge their own adventure.

Please note: In order to provide book clubs with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal aspects of the story, as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *A True Account*, you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.



1. When we first meet Hannah, she is bound out to service at a busy tavern on a wharf in Boston. In this period, this condition of servitude was very common for children and youths whose parents could not afford to keep them. What do you think Hannah's life would have looked like if she hadn't run away?
2. Hannah's world contains many embedded assumptions. She is growing up in a post Calvinist moment, but Christianity nevertheless informs all of her beliefs about the world. What are some observations on Hannah's varying relationship with religion over the course of the novel?
3. We get several glancing pictures of Hannah's sexuality throughout the story, some of which suggest her insistence on her own control, while others suggest that she has had to adapt to living without much safety or power. How, if at all, does her sexuality inform some of the choices she makes? How does it relate to her religious and social context?
4. Eventually we learn that Seneca along with John Somethingorother were the men hunting down Hannah at the beginning of the story. When do you think Seneca figured out Hannah's true identity on the Fancy? Was it when they were alone in the driftwood hut? Or did he suspect sooner?
5. Marian, too, has secrets. How do you think Marian feels about her own sexuality? Does it pose risks for her in ways that are different from the ways that sexuality poses risks for Hannah? What do you think Marian means when she tells the Modigliani "I'm a pirate?"



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6. Words, books, and the question of literacy and authorship are recurrent themes throughout the story. What does it mean for an account to be “true?” Can something be emotionally true but factually false? What is the relationship between truth and fiction?
7. Another recurrent theme is freedom versus servitude, or self-determination. In real life, the Golden Age of piracy was inextricably tied to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the ultimate expression of human unfreedom. What role does the imagination of freedom and self-determination play in this story? Can any of the characters hope to ever really be free?
8. All the characters are struggling to claim control over their own lives in one way or another. One of the characters who does this in a perhaps unexpected way is Kay. What do you think about Kay’s eventual reveal as the antagonist of this story? Were you surprised by this development? Is it really fair to characterize her as a villain, or is she just another pirate, going out on her own account, in her own way?
9. In the dramatic final confrontation between the pirates and Hannah and Seneca, it’s strongly suggested that Hannah is actually the daughter Ned Low left behind after the death of his wife. Is Hannah more like Ned than she realizes? How or how not?
10. Do you think anyone will ever find Will Fly’s treasure?

