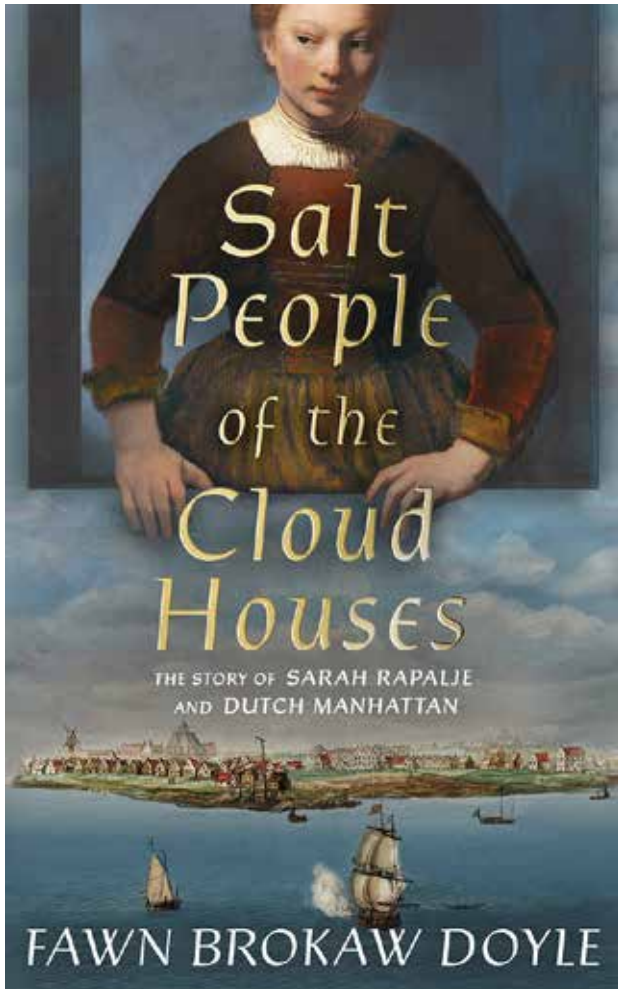


Book Club Guide

Publication date: June 9, 2025

Genre: Historical Fiction, Colonial, Women's fiction

Recommended for ages: 16+



In 1625, the first European child born in New York was a French girl, raised among Native Americans, in a Dutch colony called New Netherland.

Growing up, Sarah Rapalje helps her parents run their tavern on the southern tip of Manhattan, serving merchants and fur trappers. She looks after her siblings and works alongside Natives to farm the land. But in the rowdy trade outpost, Sarah must grow up quickly.

Just as she thinks she's found security in marriage, poor leadership propels the settlement to the brink of ruin, pitting her colony against her Native friends. As Sarah navigates personal loss and second chance love, she must start over, again and again.

One peril leads to another, forcing Sarah to question—are the biggest threats from the Natives, the English, or the Dutch West India Company that has failed to protect New Netherland? She must ensure the survival of her family, but at what costs?

It's a coming-of-age story for a frontier woman, but also for the city that would become New York.

ATTENTION:

THIS DOCUMENT INCLUDES SPECIFICS YOU MIGHT WANT TO AVOID UNTIL YOU HAVE FINISHED READING THE BOOK.

Fawn Brokaw Doyle



CHARCTERS

There were an abundance of characters to meet in SPOTCH - who were your favorites?

Which character did you find the most complex or intriguing and why?

Which character did you dislike or disagree with the most and why?

Are there any characters you wish you could have given advice to? What would you tell them?

Do you think the characters were realistically portrayed? Describe the main characters' personalities.

What is motivating Sarah's actions throughout story? What influences shape her actions?

How did the secondary characters impact or influence Sarah? What side character would you want a spinoff novel about?

Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters? What would you have done differently?

Did any of the characters remind you of yourself or someone you know? How?

Which character would be your ideal dinner guest?

Did you appreciate the story told through the perspective of Sarah? How did you feel reading it? Who else's point of view would you have liked to see from?

What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?

Do the main characters change by the end of this novel? Do they grow or mature? What events trigger such changes?

How do you think Sarah's actions affected the next generation? What values and traditions do you think they passed down?

Did you see any parallels with present day New Yorkers?

Fawn Brokaw Doyle



STRUCTURE, WRITING & GENERAL DISCUSSION

From your point of view, what were the central themes of the book? How well do you think the author did at exploring them?

What did you think of the overall structure of the novel?

What emotions did the story bring up?

Would you say this is a plot-driven book or does the story unfold slowly with a focus on character development?

Were you surprised by the plot? Or did you find it predictable?

How credible did the author make the setting and dialogue? What details brought the story to life for you?

Did you learn anything new or interesting about the time and place of the story?

What scene did you find was the most pivotal for the book? How do you think the story would have changed had that scene not taken place?

What scene resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way?

Did certain parts of the novel make you uncomfortable? Were there any scenes that made you laugh?

What is the significance of the title? Did you recognize it in the book?

What surprised you the most about the book?

What did you learn about this time period from reading the book?

Did you think the ending was appropriate? How would you have liked to have seen it end?

If you could travel back in time to New Netherland, what would you do or see?

What part of the subject of the book is still relevant in today's world, and what parallels can you draw between the book and current events?

Have any of your views or thoughts changed after reading this book?

Fawn Brokaw Doyle



QUOTES

Discuss the following quotes:

"I was raised a French Walloon, became a Dutch New Netherlander, and soon I'll be an English New Yorker..." -Sarah Rapalje (Chapter 32)

"White and purple, alternating good and bad on her wrist. How ironic the purple beads, meaning war, death, and sorrow, were more highly valued. If only he'd given her a bracelet of all white. If only a lifetime could contain only good." (Chapter 28)

"Three Sisters and now anti-Spanish flowers? You never cease to enlighten me, Sarah. I never knew crops to have so many stories." -Teunis Bogaert (Chapter 22)

"If you love him, don't hide those feelings. Rejecting love doesn't shelter you from loss," her mother advised. (Chapter 24)

Did you highlight or bookmark any passages from the book? Did you have a favorite quote or quotes? If so, share which and why?

Fawn Brokaw Doyle



FOOD + DRINK

IDEAS TO RECREATE A NEW NETHERLAND ATMOSPHERE

FOOD:

Doughnuts
Waffles
Stroopwaffles
Pancakes
Coleslaw
Gingersnap cookies

DRINKS:

Raspberry leaf tea
Chamomile tea with a splash of brandy
Anything Pumpkin Spice
Dutch beer



Sappaen - Grits

Ingredients:

1 cup yellow corn meal (grits/polenta)
2 cups water
Pinch of salt
1 tbsp butter

Instructions:

1. Bring water with salt to boil.
2. Stirring constantly, pour in the corn meal in a slow, thin stream so that the water continues to boil.
3. Reduce heat to low and continue stirring until thickened.

New Netherlanders would serve with a well in the middle filled with milk. This recipe was a versatile staple meal that could be made sweet or savory, depending what you have on hand. Some ideas: Cheese and bacon, Preserved fruit and milk, Fried egg and foraged greens



Koolsa - Coleslaw

Ingredients:

1 cup red cabbage
1 cup green cabbage
1/3 cup of wine vinegar
1/4 cup melted butter
Pinch of salt and pepper

Instructions:

1. Cut room temperature cabbage into thin strips.
2. Whisk together melted butter and wine vinegar, then combine with cabbage.

Coleslaw is a familiar dish but making it with warm butter is a New Netherland twist.

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FOOD + DRINK

IDEAS TO RECREATE A NEW NETHERLAND ATMOSPHERE



Pumpkin Cornmeal Pancakes

Ingredients:

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup yellow cornmeal
1 cup confections' sugar
1/2 tsp ground ginger
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1 cup mashed pumpkin
2.5-3 cups of milk (more for thinner pancakes)

Instructions:

1. Combine ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Combine eggs and pumpkin. Beat into dry ingredients. Add milk slowly to make a smooth batter.
2. Heat 1 tbsp butter in a frying pan over medium heat. Pour some batter in and swirl to make even.
3. Cook on both sides until nicely browned.
4. Serve with maple syrup, berries, or a dollop of whipped cream.



Kandeel - Egg Nog

Ingredients:

1 cup (250 ml) sweet wine
2 cinnamon sticks
8 whole cloves
Pinch of grated nutmeg
1 tbsp (15 ml) honey
4 egg yolks
cinnamon stick for stirring

Instructions:

1. Place the wine, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and honey in a saucepan. Bring to the boil, simmer to infuse and then strain through a fine sieve.
2. Whisk the egg yolks until light and fluffy and doubled in volume. Whisk in a hot wine mixture, then return all of it to the top of a double boiler (or in a heatproof bowl over simmering water) and continue whisking until it has thickened. Do not leave it unattended in a double boiler, as it will curdle.
3. Dust with grated nutmeg and serve while still warm.

Fawn Brokaw Doyle

