



# FRIENDS

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BOOK CLUB

FOPSL Book Club: January 17, 2020

Book: ***It Can't Happen Here***

Author: Sinclair Lewis

Discussion leader: Ruth Lindemann

Ruth Lindemann took the lead in presenting our second novel by Sinclair Lewis in the past two seasons, *It Can't Happen Here* (last season we read *The Job*). She started with discussing Lewis's life and achievements. Born in 1885, he became the first American winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1930). He achieved success as a novelist, short-story writer and playwright. *Main Street* (1920) was his first bestseller and made him a wealthy man. He followed up with *Babbitt* (1922) and *Arrowsmith* (1925) which earned him the Pulitzer Prize, which he declined because he was upset *Main Street* had not won. His next novel, *Elmer Gantry* (1927) was adapted into a 1960 film that featured Burt Lancaster in a Best Actor Oscar-winning performance.

*It Can't Happen Here* (1935) was adapted into a 1936 play by Lewis and John C. Moffett. A 1968 television film *Shadow on the Land* starring Jackie Cooper, John Forsythe and Gene Hackman was also based on Lewis' novel (you can follow the link to watch it on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/VxXam7gK3Jo>)).

Some sources describe the book as semi-satirical and Ruth noted the author intended

it to be humorous, perhaps because we naturally remember lessons that make us laugh. But in all satire there is a grain a truth, and this tale of fascism in America prompts provocative thoughts. Dorothy Thompson (1893-1961), a famous American journalist and radio broadcaster, urged her audience to pay attention to the threat that Nazi Germany posed to democracy and to Europe's Jews. She was married to Lewis (1928-1942) when he wrote *It Can't Happen Here*.

Some members recalled the movie *Jojo Rabbit* (2019) about a lonely German boy who discovers his mother is hiding a Jewish girl in the attic. Another cited Isabel Allende's novel *House of the Spirits* about the post-colonial social and political upheavals in Chile. Another cited her reliance on Palmer and Colton's *A History of the Modern World* as her quick reference on world events because we often need to understand the cyclical nature of history.

Ruth asked if the club found the novel to be disturbing? Is it too close to current events? Some recommended an audio version to offset the somewhat archaic language in the text.

David Kelly

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Friends of the Palm Springs Library Book Club meets online

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