

## Book Club Discussion Guide



*The Sleeping Car Porter* by Suzette Mayr, Page 1 (January 2023)

# The Sleeping Car Porter

By Suzette Mayr

## About the author:

Mayr is the author of five novels including her most recent book *Dr. Edith Vane* and *The Hares of Crawley Hall*. Her fourth novel *Monoceros* won the ReLit Award and the City of Calgary W.O. Mitchell Book Prize, was longlisted for the 2011 Giller Prize, and nominated for a Ferro-Grumley Award for LGBT Fiction and the Georges Bugnet Award for Fiction. *Monoceros* was also included on *The Globe and Mail's* 100 Best Books of 2011. Her novels have also been nominated for the regional Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Henry Kreisel Award for Best First Book. She has done inter-disciplinary work with Calgary theatre company Theatre Junction, visual artists Lisa Brawn and Geoff Hunter, and she was a writer-in-residence at the University of Calgary and at Widener University, Pennsylvania. She is a former President of the Writers' Guild of Alberta and teaches Creative Writing at the University of Calgary.

Source: Author's website: (<https://www.suzettemayr.com/>)

## About this book:

When a mudslide strands a train, Baxter, a queer Black sleeping car porter, must contend with the perils of white passengers, ghosts, and his secret love affair.

*The Sleeping Car Porter* brings to life an important part of Black history in North America, from the perspective of a queer man living in a culture that renders him invisible in two ways. Affecting, imaginative, and visceral enough that you'll feel the rocking of the train, *The Sleeping Car Porter* is a stunning accomplishment.

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Source: Author's website: (<https://www.suzettemayr.com/>)

### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you highlight or bookmark any passages from the book? Did you have a favourite quote or quotes? If so, share which and why.
2. Did any part of this book strike a particular emotion in you? Which part and what emotion did the book make you feel?
3. The *Sleeping Car Porter* explores an interesting part of Black Canadian history – did you know much about sleeping car porters before reading this book? What is something new you took away from this book?
4. Baxter seems to take a liking to Esme as the novel progresses, why do you think this is?
5. When Baxter finds a postcard of two naked men embracing, he keeps it even though it puts his job and reputation at risk. Why does he keep it and what does the postcard represent for Baxter?
6. Throughout the novel, Baxter hallucinates a man in the linen closet curled up and glowing like coal. What do you think about Baxter's hallucinations and what do they mean?
7. The *Sleeping Car Porter* depicts the gruelling and repetitive work of being a porter. How does Mayr convey this feeling in her writing?
8. The novel takes place in the confined space of a train. In what other ways is Baxter's life confined?
9. If you had the chance to ask the author of this book one question, what would it be?

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10. What about dentistry is so appealing for Baxter? Can you think of any literal or metaphorical reasons for why he might be attracted to dentistry as a profession?
11. Throughout *The Sleeping Car Porter*, Baxter reads the novel *The Scarab from Jupiter*, and seems to find solace in the book. What is the specific appeal of the book for Baxter?
12. What do you think will happen to Baxter after the end of the book?

Source: Coach House Books (<https://chbooks.com/Books/T/The-Sleeping-Car-Porter>)