

November 2020 - Nonfiction Book Club
A Woman of No Importance:
The Untold Story of the American Spy Who Helped Win World War II
by Sonia Purcell

1. Sonia Purcell describes Virginia Hall's resistance work during World War II as "a Homeric tale of adventure, action and seemingly unfathomable courage." How would you describe Hall? What was it about her personality and inner character that attracted her to spy-craft—and what made her so adept at its practice?
2. Consider the danger involved in undercover operations—a field in which its participants are at high risk for capture, torture, and death. What drives people, both men and women, to take such dire risks and to play the high-stakes game of cat and mouse?
3. Purcell observes, "Dispatching a one-legged thirty-five-year-old desk clerk on a blind mission into France was, on paper, an almost insane gamble." *Almost* insane? What was their thinking?
4. Talk about the good-old-boy office politics underlying some of the decisions to place under trained personnel in the field, and some of the fatalities those decisions led to.
5. It's almost as if Hall had a sixth sense, which repeatedly kept her out of the Nazis' clutches. Talk about her use of disguises, her ability to build trust across borders, her sudden appearances and just as sudden disappearances. What are some of the close calls in which she escaped capture? Do some episodes stand out more than others—in terms as being more daring, more thrilling, or more anxiety-drenching?
6. Discuss the many other individuals involved in the resistance network, those doing extraordinary work. Consider, for instance, Germaine Guerin. Or perhaps the woman who simply asks for three aspirins at a cafe.
7. What about Hall's post-war life in which she had to fight another type of tyranny: sexism? Discuss the offer of a low-level clerkship at the CIA despite Hall's brilliant performance in the field. Or recall the man who referred to Hall as a "gung-ho lady left over from OSS days overseas." Talk about the other women who made untold (literally) sacrifices for the Allied forces during the war.

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