



# *Fall of Giants*

## Discussion guide for book groups and students

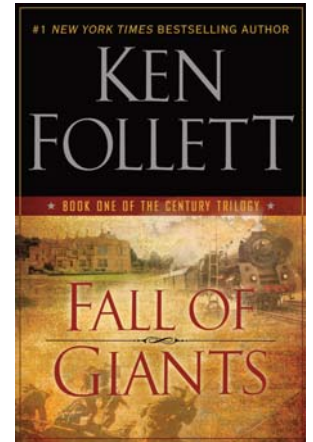


### About the author

Ken Follett is the author of twenty bestsellers, from the groundbreaking *Eye of the Needle* to *The Pillars of the Earth* – his bestselling book – and *World Without End*.

### About the book

*Fall of Giants* is the first novel in Ken's 'Century' trilogy. It follows the fates of five interrelated families – American, German, Russian, English and Welsh – as they move through the world-shaking dramas of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the struggle for women's suffrage.



- ❖ Before reading *Fall of Giants*, what did you know about World War I? Did you learn anything new upon finishing the novel?
- ❖ Is there a custom or practice from the book's early 20th-century time period that you wish existed in our modern day? What would it be, and why do you think it should have a place in today's world?
- ❖ Is it significant that *Fall of Giants* begins with the stories of Billy and Ethel Williams? Would the novel have been different if other characters' stories opened the book, such as those of Grigori and Lev Peshkov, or Gus Dewar?
- ❖ Talk about the historical figures that appear throughout *Fall of Giants*, such as Woodrow Wilson, King George V, Vladimir Lenin, and others. What did you think of Ken Follett's depiction of them? Do you like seeing notable people such as these come alive in fiction, or do you prefer reading about them in a strictly historical context?
- ❖ When you first read about Billy Williams in Chapter One, did you anticipate how his life would unfurl; as one example, that he would end up in running for Parliament? What about other characters: could you guess what some of them would end up doing or being at the book's end?
- ❖ Do you enjoy reading epic novels such as this one? What makes them so appealing to readers, in your opinion?
- ❖ In continuation of the above question, if you had to identify one of the main characters' stories as one that would make a good "stand-alone" novel, which would it be? Why do you think his/her story would make an enjoyable book on its own?
- ❖ Think about the main characters and what place faith held in their lives. Did religion help or hinder their respective circumstances? What is the overall role of religion in *Fall of Giants*?
- ❖ Along these lines, discuss the characters who abandoned their respective faiths. What caused them to walk away from their beliefs? To what end?

- ❖ Follett depicts life in the early 20th century through a series of detailed and imagery-rich scenes: the pitch-darkness of a Welsh coal mine, the opulence of an English country manor, the austerity of pre-industrial Russia, the horrors of a French battlefield. Which scenes stood out for you? Why did they make such an impression?
- ❖ Follett writes from the vantage points of people whose home countries come to the brink of – and finally enter into – a world war. What was it like to read the perspectives of enemies as they embark on battle with one another? Did you find yourself taking sides in any way? Did reading about World War I through fiction cause you to think differently about the conflict?
- ❖ Follett populates this novel with several strong female characters. Compare/contrast some of them; who was your favorite? Which one did you like least? Apply the same question to the book’s male figures. When considering those of different background and social class, were any of the male figures similar to one another?
- ❖ Discuss Maud and Ethel’s relationship. Did you expect them to form such a lasting bond, considering they met as mistress and servant? What did you think of the circumstances surrounding how their friendship ultimately dissolved?
- ❖ Also contemplate Ethel and Maud’s work as women’s rights advocates. Were there aspects of each woman’s personal life that seemed at odds with her commitment to advancing the cause of women?
- ❖ Go back to the Aberowen mine explosion in Chapter Two. Do you think it’s a metaphor for any of the novel’s themes? How do things change in Aberowen, and elsewhere, after this disaster?
- ❖ Discuss examples of the disparity between how women and men were treated during this era. Were women regarded better, or worse, than you imagined they’d be? How far have women come since the early 1900s? What inequalities between the sexes still persist today?
- ❖ Think about the ways the main characters’ lives intersected throughout the book. Were there any characters that didn’t meet over the entirety of the novel that you wished did? Who, and why?
- ❖ What did you think of Earl Fitzherbert at the beginning of *Fall of Giants*? How did he evolve as a man throughout the course of the narrative? Did your opinion of Fitz change from your initial impression of him?
- ❖ Consider the book’s title. Who or what are the “giants” of the story? How did they fall?
- ❖ What did you think of the book’s ending? Did the author succeed in wrapping up the many threads and strands in *Fall of Giants*? Which of the characters in *Fall of Giants* do you expect to be reading about in books two and three of *The Century Trilogy*?



*More information on *Fall of Giants* and *The Century Trilogy*  
is available at <http://www.ken-follett.com>*