

## Author Interview

**Harris:** The idea for the book came from a comment her husband made one day while he was immersed in a football game on TV. "It was a throwaway comment, designed to annoy and it did. It was along the lines of...*Chocolate is to women what football is to men...*" The idea stuck, and Harris began thinking that "people have these conflicting feelings about chocolate, and that a lot of people who have very little else in common relate to chocolate in more or less the same kind of way. It became a kind of challenge to see exactly how much of a story I could get which was uniquely centered around chocolate."

(*litlovers.com*)

## Reviews

Joanne Harris may have created the perfect diet book in her debut novel, *Chocolat*, a bittersweet confection that's light on plot but satisfying....The novel tries to be profound about life and death, but the pleasure comes from the food...delicious enough to satisfy any sweet tooth and spare you the calories of dessert. –Michael Jacobs-  
*USA Today*

...[An] irresistible confection....explores the struggle between good and evil...but ultimately celebrates...indulgence.–Megan Harlan-*People Magazine*

Magic abounds in Harris' novel....The gods of legend may dine well in their celestial palaces, but the true sorcery of cooking cannot take place [sic] unless the cook and the guests are mortal. This paradox of the human condition is surely one of the messages of Harris' book. –Nancy Willard-*The New York Times Book Review*

(*barnesandnoble.com*)

## Movie Adaptation

It is the late 1950s, but it might as well be the late 1850s in a small French town where everyone behaves as they should (supposedly), and attends church regularly. When a strong North wind blows through town, it brings the vivacious and mysterious Vianne (Juliette Binoche) and her young daughter Anouk (Victoire Thivisol). Vianne is soon the talk of the town: an unwed mother who declines to go to church and opens up a chocolate shop in the midst of Lent. Her good-natured, honorable personality and psychic ability (she can predict what kind of sweets best suit each person, and magically cures each of them of their particular maladies) make her as irresistible as her delectable treats. However, Vianne and her daughter are resented by the conservative mayor, the Comte de Reynaud (Alfred Molina), and by the pious Caroline (Carrie-Anne Moss), who has disowned her own spirited mother (Judi Dench, who plays Vianne's landlady), refusing the elderly woman access to her beloved grandson. This touching fairy tale, based on the novel by Joanne Harris, was filmed on location in rural France. An intelligent, exquisitely filmed fable that deals with the idea of 20th Century paganism rising up against a closed-minded church and a persevering aristocracy, *Chocolat* is enjoyable, romantic, and entertaining, with affecting performances by both its stars and its supporting actors (Lena Olin and Johnny Depp.)

*(rottentomatoes.com)*

## Movie Reviews

A work of artistry and craftsmanship at the highest level. –Kevin Thomas- *Los Angeles Times*

The most satisfying epicurean feast since "Big Night." –Lael Loewenstein- *Variety*

A sinfully scrumptious bonbon.– Peter Travers -*Rolling Stone*

So assured in its manipulative prowess that only afterward do you realize how fully you've been worked over. –Elvis Mitchell- *The New York Times*

*(moviefone.com)*

## **Further Reading**

*Practical Magic* by Alice Hoffman

*The Seduction of Water* by Carol Goodman

*Portrait in Sepia* by Isabel Allende

*Cat's Eye* by Margaret Atwood

*Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel

*Pomegranate Soup* by Marsha Mehran

*Crescent* by Diana Abu-Jaber

**BOOK CLUB To Go!**  
**Chocolat**  
**By Joanne Harris**

**Possible Discussion Questions**

1. To what extent is Reynaud the villain of the piece? Is it possible to understand or sympathize with the motivations and feelings behind his actions?
2. Reynaud and Vianne seem to be natural enemies from the start, and yet they both have significant elements in common: a haunted past, a desire for acceptance. How do you think this affects their relationship?
3. The preparation and eating of food is described in detail in many parts of the book. What is the significance of this, and what do the attitudes of the main characters towards food show about their personalities?
4. The author uses the first-person narrative voice for both of her principal characters. Why do you feel she does this, and how effective is each in showing the character's attitudes and motivations?
5. Vianne appears to other people as a strong and confident woman, but is secretly filled with fears and insecurities. To what extent do you think she has been strengthened or damaged by her relationship with her bohemian mother?
6. The themes of moving on and settling down recur frequently in the book. Why do you think Vianne wants so badly to remain in the village? Do you think she eventually decides to stay?

*(litlovers.com)*