



The Handmaid's Tale

A Novel

Margaret Atwood · 1985

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

In the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic regime has overthrown the United States government. Offred is a Handmaid, assigned to a powerful Commander and his wife for one purpose: to bear their child.

Through her memories, we see how the old world slipped away one step at a time. Atwood has said she put nothing in the book that had not already happened somewhere in history. Forty years later, it is still one of the most widely read novels about power, control over women's bodies, religious extremism and resistance.

WHY WE PICKED IT

It is a classic for a reason, and it gives us a shared language for talking about how rights can be lost gradually, not just all at once.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TABLE

- 01 Gilead did not happen overnight. What small steps does Offred remember from before?
- 02 How does Gilead use language (names, greetings, scripture) to control people?
- 03 Some women help enforce Gilead's rules. Why do you think they go along with it?

CONNECT IT TO RIGHT NOW

The FDA is re-reviewing the safety of mifepristone, the first pill in most medication abortions, and several court cases are on hold waiting for that review.

Who should decide which medications are available: doctors, federal agencies, courts, or state lawmakers?

A near-total abortion ban advanced in the South Carolina Senate this spring would classify abortion pills as controlled substances and set prison terms of up to 20 years for doctors who perform illegal abortions.

Atwood said she invented nothing. How do you talk about a book like this with people who see these laws very differently than you do?