Discussion Guide

for

Riviera Gold

by Laurie R. King

(CONTAINS SPOILERS!)
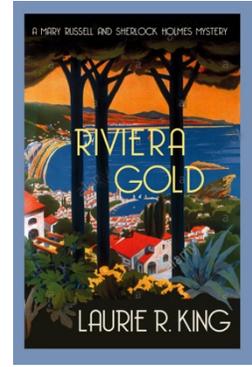
1. The recurring characters in *Riviera Gold*—Sherlock Holmes, Mrs. Hudson, and the others—are not exactly as they first appeared in the Conan Doyle stories. Even Mary Russell has changed profoundly since her introduction in *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*. Do you find these character developments convincing, as reflections of personal and societal changes?

2. This story makes use of two levels of flashback—the opening chapter takes place many years in the past, while others work up to the 1925 present, covering the weeks since Mrs. Hudson arrived in Monaco. Did you find these flashbacks helped explain her past and her chameleon nature? Or did you find them distracting?

3. Many of the previous Russell and Holmes "memoirs" are set in cold and wintry places. How does the summer weather affect the plot and flavor of *Riviera Gold*? Did its summertime setting lead to unexpected story-lines or reveal new personality traits of the characters?

4. Does *Riviera Gold* capture how you pictured the South of France in 1925? If not, what surprised you, or struck you as anachronistic?

5. The language used in the Russell "memoirs" is not only English-English, but very formal. Do you think new readers trip over Russell's voice, and even need to look up words? If so, do you think that's a problem, or does it enrich your sense of her personality?

6. Fans of Mary Russell collect her "Russellisms"—short, clever lines that would go well on a coffee mug or t-shirt. What were your favorite read-aloud moments or pithy sayings from *Riviera Gold*?

7. Did you guess "who done it" before Russell did? Were there any plot twists and red herrings that surprised you?

8. The Russell and Holmes stories are fun, historical entertainments, but they often have serious themes, questions, and ethical dilemmas. In *Riviera Gold*, Russell is uncomfortable working with Mycroft Holmes, outraged at finding a corrupt arms dealer living peacefully in Monaco, and torn between loyalty to a husband and loyalty to a beloved friend. What do you think of these threads? Do you hope Russell solves her conflicts? Can you think of other threads and themes that weave through the story?

9. How necessary do you feel it is to have read previous books in the series? Would you recommend this one to someone who hadn't read others? What about recommending it to someone who doesn't read a lot of mysteries in general?

10. Did you learn things from *Riviera Gold*? The author's research includes "White" Russians in Monaco; Americans in the Côte d'Azur; Basil Zaharoff; Sara and Gerald Murphy; Lillie Langtry; the craft of pouring bronze—and more. Do you like to feel you're learning from a novel? Did you have a clear sense of what was research and what was the author's imagination—that is, would you have known that Rafe Ainsley, Count Vasilev, and the once-racy Mrs. Hudson appear only in the world of Mary Russell?

11. Before reading *Riviera Gold,* did you know about the Murphys and their relationships with everyone from Pablo Picasso to F. Scott Fitzgerald ? Why do you suppose these two had such a

large effect on the art and literature world of the 20th century? Do you know individuals like them, who attract interesting people though they themselves are not influential artists, or scientists, or the like?

12. The murderer in *Riviera Gold* is not the only villain—and is not necessarily the most villainous character. How did you feel when you realized who the killer was? Did you wish it had been another person?

13. It is ten years since Russell and Holmes met, and four years since they married. Are some of the choices Russell makes in *Riviera Gold* signs of tension in the marriage? Or do you take them as indications of her growing maturity and independence of thought? How is Holmes going to react when he finds out about Russell's choices here? Do you anticipate problems between them in future stories?

14. The book has more than one layer of mystery: the murder itself; the killer's motives; the role of Niko Cassavetes; and Mrs. Hudson's papers. Not all of these have neat, clear endings—but are they satisfying anyway? Why?

15. Russell and Holmes react differently to the news of Mrs. Hudson's involvement in a murder. Is Russell too eager to see her as innocent? Is Holmes too willing to mistrust his old landlady? Are their reactions due to knowing different things about the woman and her past? And do you think one or both of them move closer to the other's point of view by the end?

16. Mrs. Hudson has gone from a crime-filled youth to a long life of excitement and danger as landlady and housekeeper to Sherlock Holmes. If you were in her shoes, what would you do with a sudden and unexpected retirement?

17. Who was the most interesting historical person you met in the story? Was there someone you felt you'd like to know better?

18. Why do you think so many great artists and writers were not only in France at this time, but also knew one another? Was it the social 'glue' of people like the Murphys, the attractiveness of Paris and the south of France as places to live after the Great War, a newfound sense of social liberation, or….something else?

19. Where do you imagine Russell and Holmes will end up next? Do you think they're actually off to Transylvania to investigate vampires? Will Mrs. Hudson turn up in their lives again?

20. Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes are very similar, yet also very different. Who do you think has the better detecting mind for a case like *Riviera Gold*?

More about Russell & Holmes, and other *Riviera Gold* extras, on https://laurierking.com