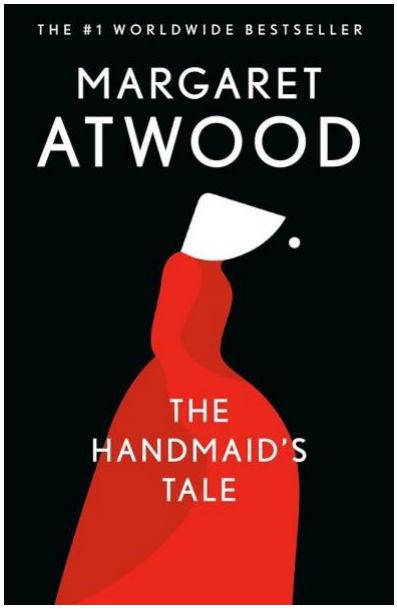
Prison Reading Groups
25 years
1999-2024

Book Talk

The Handmaid's Tale
by Margaret Atwood
Number of pages: 330



The Handmaid's Tale is set in a future dystopian version of the United States called Gilead. After a war and a fertility crisis, women's rights are removed and they are assigned different roles in the new society to encourage childbearing. The story follows Handmaid Offred, whose role is to give a baby to a socially elite family. It covers life before Gilead and the process of reorganising the society along strict religious lines.

The Handmaid's Tale was turned into a TV programme starring Elisabeth Moss. Margaret Atwood wrote a sequel, ***The Testaments***, in 2019. She has won two Booker Prizes.

We recommend this book if you enjoyed ***Nineteen Eighty-Four*** by George Orwell, or ***The Power*** and ***The Future*** by Naomi Alderman.

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you think of the narrative style of the book?

2. Do you have any sympathy for Serena Joy or Aunt Lydia?

3. What do you think the book has to say about different types of freedoms?

4. What impact does banning women from reading have?

5. How do you think taking away people's names and giving them uniforms makes it easier to control them?

6. Margaret Atwood has said there is nothing in the book that hasn't happened somewhere in real life – what real examples can you think of that are similar to the book?

Thank you to our volunteer Erin for choosing this title and creating the resource.