



## SAND SHARKS: Book Club Discussion Guide

*Irrelevant factoid: I used the official North Carolina Toast in my dedication. Three years earlier, our Secretary of State, the Honorable Elaine Marshall, had presented to me the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, which gave me "the special privilege to propose the North Carolina Toast in select company anywhere in the free world." I thought I should take advantage of it.*

**Margaret Maron on the writing of *Sand Sharks*:** This book grew out of several district court judges' conferences that I have attended. Judges are required to attend professional seminars every year and this is where they learn about new laws the state legislators have passed as well as rulings from our appellate courts that may have further defined murky points. A strict reading depends on what the law actually says, not necessarily what the lawmakers intended. This can make for some amusement at times. I feel privileged to have watched the judicial mind at work and at play.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Margaret Maron has said that she seldom knows "who did it" when she begins a book. Often, her plots are sparked by a true story from one of the North Carolina newspapers. She develops the plot by asking herself, "Who's lying here?" and "What else might have happened that led up to this point?" In *Sand Sharks*, she uses several instances of judicial sloppiness as possible motives for killing a judge. Some she read about in newspapers, others were related to her by attorneys and judges, who often provide her with lively courtroom anecdotes. Have you ever read a similar news story that made you think the judge was asleep on the bench?
2. After she spots Judge Peter Jeffrey's body floating in the Cape Fear River, Deborah's list of suspects grows to include judicial colleagues, local television personalities, restaurant employees, and her cousin's friend. Maron calls her books "traditional fair play novels," i.e., the reader sees everything the sleuth sees. *Sand Sharks* introduces all the key players—killer and victims—by the end of Chapter 3. How does she do this without giving too much away too soon?
3. In this Deborah Knott series Maron uses the preacher and the pragmatist as her alter egos. Select a preacher-pragmatist incident to read aloud or talk about. Is there any significance to the fact that Deborah thinks of them as male?
4. Maron begins each chapter with an epigraph. Cite one and tell how it relates to the chapter.
5. Were you aware that NC divorce laws take infidelity off the table if the injured spouse condones the infidelity by resuming marital relations?
6. Allen Stancil first appeared in *Up Jumps the Devil*. Why did Maron bring him back for this book?
7. In addition to a murder mystery, Maron gives the reader a change of pace by writing chapters about Deborah's friends, former lovers, would-be lovers, Wrightsville Beach, parenting, Wilmington's restaurants, and Dwight Bryant. Did you enjoy these "switch stories"?
8. Maron has attended several judicial conferences over the years and many real judges were named in *Sand Sharks*. Were you surprised by anything you learned about District Court Judges after reading her true-to-life descriptions in this book?

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