

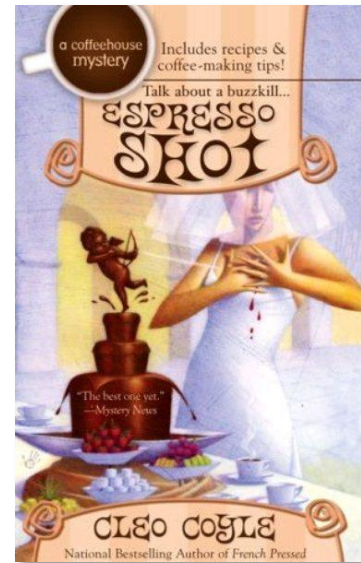
Reading Group Questions Books 7 & 8

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Espresso Shot by Cleo Coyle

Coffeehouse Mystery #7

Story Summary: Clare is hired to create a gourmet coffee and dessert bar for a New York society wedding. Unfortunately, the beautiful, wealthy bride-to-be has become a full-blown bridezilla. The only way Clare can deal with her is to focus on business. But murder is Clare's business, too, so when fatal accidents befall people close to the bride, Clare starts to investigate, and what she unveils amid melted chocolate and steaming mochaccinos, may just get her burned. Includes tasty recipes.



1. What happens in the prologue of this mystery? What does it tell you about the killer?
2. With her ex-husband's impending wedding, coffeehouse manager Clare Cosi begins her narration of the story by comparing weddings to funerals. Why do you think the author put those words in Clare's mouth? Do you find her comparison entertaining or particularly telling? What does Clare recall about her own wedding? How does that compare with the one her ex-husband's bride-to-be, Breanne, is planning? Does she have mixed feelings about her ex-husband remarrying? Do those feelings change in the course of the story?
3. Madame, Matt's octogenarian mother and Clare's former mother-in-law still hopes Clare and her son will reconcile. Do you think Madame will have a change of heart? Or do you think she's right, that Clare and Matt belong together?
4. Matt is convinced someone wants to kill Breanne. Why does he think this? Detective Mike Quinn, Clare's love interest, agrees, and makes a suggestion that shocks Clare. Did it shock you? Was Quinn right to suggest this course of action?

5. Fashion maven Breanne is not happy about Clare's presence, and orders her food-writer friend Roman Brio to pump Clare for the real reason she's around. What did you think of Roman? By the end of the story, who does Roman help more, Breanne, or Clare?

6. At *Trend Magazine*, employee Monica is described as "a Breanne wannabe" who "is dropping the ball." Later she is suspected of sabotaging her boss. Did you feel that Monica was a victim of office politics? Or do you think she perpetrated the bad environment to advance her own career? Do you think *Trend* is more cutthroat than the average workplace? Or do you think such office politics are fairly common? Have you ever been a victim of office politics or known someone who has? Have you ever wished a "blind" boss could see what was wrong in his or her own office?

7. Roman Brio and Clare go to a secret underground restaurant in the borough of Queens. Why do they go there? What are they investigating? What do they discover? Clare has an amazing meal that night and meets a famous TV personality and food critic. Did the critic remind you of anyone on TV now? Underground restaurants, bars, and clubs do exist in New York City. Do you think there are any in your town? Would you ever go to one?

8. Later in ***Espresso Shot***, the baristas laugh about giving Mike Quinn a sample of the rare and expensive Kopi Luwak coffee. Why were the baristas laughing? If we had a pot of Kopi Luwak here at this book club meeting, would you be game for sampling it?

9. When the underground restaurant is invaded by armed robbers, it becomes clear it's an inside job somehow connected to Breanne. What gives the robbers away? How does Roman Brio's reaction escalate the situation? Were you upset by his reaction? Why did he risk his safety? What does that tell you about Breanne?

10. In several scenes, ex-girlfriends appear to heap abuse on hapless groom-to-be Matt. Were these scenes just amusing? Or was there a reason for them to be there? What sparked these outbursts? How did it factor into the mystery plot?

11. Despite talk of an "open" relationship, Matt discovers his future wife was so jealous that she violated his privacy. Was Matt right to be angry? Did he over-react? Why do you think he was so angry? Does Clare understand and sympathize with Breanne's motives?

12. Breanne is not all that she appears to be. In the course of solving the mystery, Clare uncovers the truth about Breanne's past. What is it? When Breanne's final secret is revealed, Clare sees the fashion maven in a new light. Did you? Was Breanne more sympathetic after the truth was exposed? What does Breanne say to Clare that makes her

understand her feelings about Matt? Does that help Clare resolve her own mixed emotions about Matt marrying another woman?

13. Some readers describe Breanne as a type of character you love to hate, what do you think they mean by that? Could the story of Sleeping Beauty exist without the evil fairy Maleficent? Could the story of Cinderella work without her nasty stepsisters? Does that idea apply to Breanne in this story or not?

14. After the harrowing conclusion at Matt and Bree's wedding, Madame comes to a surprising conclusion about the happy couple. Do you think Madame is right, or are you more skeptical?

15. Who were your favorite red herrings? Did you think you solved the mystery? Were you surprised by the killer's identity? Do you blame Matt or Breanne for the killer's motive? Was the murderer justified?

16. During the final scene in **Espresso Shot**, Mike Quinn and Clare Cosi are back in the Village Blend coffeehouse. Mike says to Clare: "...some people are better at making messes than others." And Clare replies: "So why is it people like us always have to clean them up?" Quinn doesn't answer the question directly. Can you? (*Some prompts to help...*) What sort of jobs would you characterize as cleaning up other people's messes? (Police officers? Firefighters? Doctors? Paramedics? Any others?) What sort of person goes into this kind of work? Why do you think the author chose that note to end on? (*Next question will help.*)

17. How does Clare Cosi feel about being the kind of person who "cleans up other people's messes"? Is she focusing on life's unfairness? Is Clare reminding herself what she lacks compared to Breanne? Or is she focused on the blessings and happiness she has in her own life? What does that tell you about her character?

18. What do you think the future will hold for these characters? The next title in the Coffeehouse Mystery series, **Holiday Grind**, has a theme of Christmas in New York and introduces a police officer who will play a major role in the later books of the series. Are you interested in reading it?

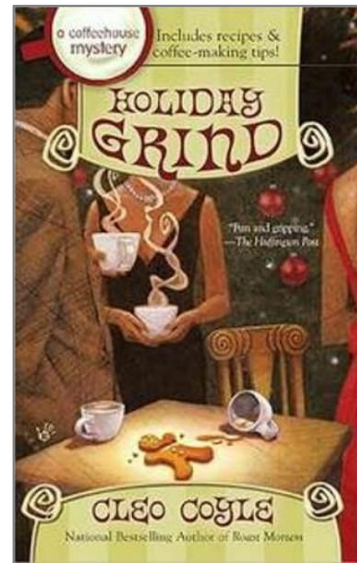
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Holiday Grind by Cleo Coyle **Coffeehouse Mystery #8**

Story Summary: The holidays turn deadly when Clare finds a sidewalk charity Santa Claus named Alf Glockner gunned down in an alley. Convinced his death was more than the tragic result of a random mugging, Clare sets out to find the heartless Kringle killer. An extra-large recipe section includes special holiday recipes plus a glossary of coffeehouse terms, homemade coffee drinks and syrups, and secrets to making espressos and lattes in your own kitchen.



1. This Coffeehouse Mystery begins with a prologue in the point of view of a killer who is coldly stalking a victim. Who is this killer gunning for? What alibi is the killer planning to set up to avoid detection?
2. As a contrast to the book's chilly opening, the reader finds the Village Blend staff members warm and dry in their cozy coffeehouse, brainstorming ideas for "taste of the season" lattes. The legendary gastronome Brillat-Savarin said, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are." Did the "taste of the season" choices by Clare and each of her baristas help tell you who they were?
3. What would your own "taste of the season" ideas be for Clare if you had joined her brainstorming session? Do any of these ideas come with a personal story of a family tradition? Remember what Clare also noted later in the book: Not all foodie memories are good foodie memories. Are there any tastes from holidays past that you would not want to eat or drink again?
4. Who is the murder victim and what is his connection to the Village Blend? Why does Clare like this man so much?

5. Cleo Coyle uses the state of the economy as a catalyst in her characters' lives. How is the slow economy affecting Clare? In what ways did the meltdown of the financial sector in New York City drastically change the lives of our murder victim and his daughter?
6. One of the most challenging aspects for a writer of amateur sleuth mysteries is getting the amateur plausibly involved in a murder case. Motivation becomes the key here—not for the killer, but for the amateur sleuth. (In a police procedural or PI mystery, for example, solving crimes is already the main character's profession.) How does Coyle get Clare Cosi involved in this particular case? What is her motivation? If it were you telling this story, could you have found another way to get Clare involved in the case?
7. Let's discuss Clare's nighttime investigation in the courtyard. She goes back to the original crime scene to search it. Why does Clare do this? What clue does she find? Was she smart or stupid here—or both? What does this sequence reveal about Clare Cosi? What does this sequence reveal about Clare's relationship with her ex-husband, Matt Allegro?
8. Who is Sergeant Emmanuel Franco? Can you name some of his defining characteristics? What did you like or dislike about him? What did you think of the way Clare handled Franco in the Sixth Precinct's interview room? How about lawyer Chip Castle? Did Clare outwit them both? What did this arrest sequence reveal about Clare Cosi?
9. Clare is in a relationship with Detective Mike Quinn. How does Mike react to Clare's being arrested? Did this surprise you? What did it tell you about Mike Quinn? What is the OD Squad? What "cold case" is heating up for Mike in this book?
10. Who is Madame Dreyfus Allegro Dubois? What do you see as some of her defining traits? What does Madame figure out about her granddaughter Joy's holiday plans? What does that tell you about Madame?
11. What did you think of the television taping that Clare attends with Madame? Did it remind you of any television shows you know of? What were your impressions of this particular show? What clue did Clare notice during the taping? Did you suspect anyone she meets with being involved in Alf's murder?
12. Did you enjoy Clare's trip to Staten Island? How did you like Esther as a sleuthing partner? Who does Esther photograph with her cell phone camera? Where and when

does she do this? Why does it give Clare an important clue to follow? Where does it lead Clare?

13. What is Omar Linford's connection to the murder victim? What is Shelly Glockner's connection? How did these two characters strike you when Clare meets with them? Did you believe one of them was involved with Alf's murder? What does Omar Linford's secretary give to Clare before she leaves the island? Why is that important to the plot?

14. Did the Staten Island ferry "event" surprise you? Why was this done to Clare? What was taken from her handbag on the ferry? Who did you think was responsible for what happened to Clare in that sequence?

15. What second murder occurs that helps Clare put the pieces of the murder-mystery puzzle together?

16. Mike Quinn gets some mysterious phone calls throughout *Holiday Grind*. Did you have a theory on this before the truth was revealed? What does Clare discover in her boyfriend's bedroom near the end of the book? What is Clare's reaction? Why does Clare think that Mike wasn't playing square with her? Do you agree with Clare? Or is she being too hard on Mike?

17. How does the white kitten act as a catalyst in solving the crime? How does "the box" that Matt carries off end up being an important and quite unusual factor in the plot?

18. What vital piece of evidence does Clare ultimately uncover that helps her solve Alf's murder? How does this evidence help resolve Mike's case?

19. What was your reaction to the book's climactic moment (the last event, right before the epilogue)? Explain what three open plotlines are resolved in this single climax.

20. Let's discuss some larger themes of the book. What did you think of Brother Dom's philosophy on what happens to people when they lose their jobs, lifelong careers, even their marriages, friends, and families? (See page 208.) Who did this happen to in the book?

21. Clare's investigation in this book becomes more than a search for Alf's killer. What else is Clare searching for?

22. Why do you think Clare Cosi can't stop herself from getting involved in solving murders? What do you see in Clare's character that makes her want to do this?

23. On page 277 of the book's epilogue, Clare Cosi quotes a very specific section of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Why do you think the author has Clare do this? (*The next question will help you with the answer.*)

24. When you consider the Dickens' quotation on page 277 of the epilogue and then think back to the opening of the book, where Clare blurts something out at the Christmas party (*bottom of page 17 and page 18*), what do you think the author is trying to say about her main character, Clare Cosi, and the world in which she lives? Does this help you understand why Clare can't stop herself from getting involved in righting wrongs? Do you agree or disagree with Clare's view?

25. Brother Dom was a religious man. Why do you think he chose to use Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* to minister to people instead of the Bible? Do you think this echoes Clare's earlier, more lighthearted comments about trying to build bridges across the divides between people with different belief systems (*see bottom of page 7*)?

26. What does Clare Cosi's last line in the epilogue of the book mean to you?

27. Did you like the coffee facts and information at the end of the book? Did you learn anything surprising from them? What recipes would you most like to taste?

28. Author Cleo Coyle often introduces a "walk-on" character in a book who then takes a larger role in a succeeding mystery. Firefighter Michael Quinn, cousin to Clare's police detective boyfriend, is introduced in the Staten Island Ferry sequence. The author brings this character back in the next Coffeehouse Mystery, ***Roast Mortem***. Readers will discover why there is bad blood between the Quinn cousins, something hinted at in this story. Are you interested in reading ***Roast Mortem***?

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