Discussion Questions – *The Show Girl* by Nicola Harrison

1. *The Show Girl* takes place in the 1920s, when some young women (flappers) were rebelling against the Victorian ways of their parents and exploring their newfound freedom. Would you have wanted to come of age during the Roaring Twenties? Why or why not?
2. From page 1 Olive is ambitious, determined, and unwilling to let anything stand in her way. Did you relate to or admire that quality in her or did it make her an unsympathetic character? How did your perception of Olive change throughout the book?
3. What did you think about the choices Olive made, specifically with regard to her daughter? Would you have done things differently? What lessons do you think she learned in the end?
4. Olive’s relationship with her parents was strained. Was she justified in demanding her right to work as a performer, or did she cause her parents heartache for nothing? What were your feelings about Olive’s parents at the beginning of the book, and did your feelings about them change?
5. How did you feel about Archie when he was first introduced compared with later in the novel, when he began to feel differently about starting a family? Did you find him overbearing or did you sympathize with him?
6. From the stage-door johnnies and show girls in Manhattan’s theater district to the bohemians and artists in the Village and the wealthy “camp” owners in the Adirondacks, Olive and Archie mingled in many social circles. Which group would you have been most interested to spend time with and why?
7. Sometimes friends are found in the most unlikely places. How did Olive’s friendships with Ruthie and Alberto shape her in new ways? Which other friendships stood out to you?
8. The unique mix of style and sophistication in the Ziegfeld Follies forever transformed the Broadway musical. How much did you know about Florenz Ziegfeld’s shows prior to reading *The Show Girl*? Does it make you think differently about any shows you’ve seen?
9. Ziegfeld’s show girls were advertised as “the most beautiful women in the world.” Their bodies were celebrated and their sexuality was liberated, but all that glitz and glam often came at a cost. Many of these young women made sacrifices and compromises in order to enjoy the spotlight. How has our society changed, then versus now?
10. Despite Prohibition being in effect from 1920 to 1933, booze abounds in this book! Are you the type of person who would have played by the rules if you’d lived in the ’20s or would you have frequented the speakeasies?
11. Olive lived with a huge secret looming over her. What do you think would have happened if she’d gone ahead and married Archie without telling him about her past? Would they have lived happily ever after?
12. Endings almost always lead to a lively discussion. What do you think will happen next for Olive and her new family?