

Topped Chef

Book 3 of the Key West Food Critic Mysteries

Discussion Questions

1. *Topped Chef* opens with Hayley worrying about her first negative review. How do you feel about restaurant reviews, either online or in newspapers? Do you trust them? Do you write them? Do you feel critics should write about their negative experiences as well as their positive?
2. Do you watch celebrity chef or cooking TV shows? Which chefs do you like and why?
3. Peter Shapiro mentions several times that reality TV is entertainment. And entertainment means conflict. So all's fair in what they film and how they attempt to goad the participants into reacting on camera. How do you feel about TV shows exploiting the conflict in real people's lives? Which reality TV shows do you watch and why are they appealing? Would you consider being a participant in such a show?
4. One of the most challenging parts of writing a mystery with an amateur sleuth has to do with her stake in solving the mystery. Were you convinced by Hayley's insistence on getting involved in this story? How does this fit with her character?
5. Hayley struggles with her feelings about the homeless people who inhabit Key West. What conclusions do you see her drawing by the end of the book?
6. Hayley puts her own safety at risk to rescue someone else. Do you see this as consistent with what you know about her? How do you think you would react in a similar situation?
7. In *Topped Chef*, one of the contestants makes recipes from the tradition of molecular gastronomy. Does this kind of cooking appeal to you? Why or why not?

8. How do you feel about the quote from chapter nineteen, from Mona Talbott, that the grandmother is the ultimate cooking teacher in the world? What is your family's cooking like? Do you have treasured recipes passed down from a grandmother or another relative?