**The Excellent Lombards
by Jane Hamilton**

**About the Book**

Mary Frances "Frankie" Lombard is fiercely in love with her family's sprawling apple orchard and the tangled web of family members who inhabit it. Content to spend her days planning capers with her brother William, competing with her brainy cousin Amanda, and expertly tending the orchard with her father, Frankie desires nothing more than for the rhythm of life to continue undisturbed. But she cannot help being haunted by the historical fact that some family members end up staying on the farm and others must leave. Change is inevitable, and threats of urbanization, disinheritance, and college applications shake the foundation of Frankie's roots. As Frankie is forced to shed her childhood fantasies and face the possibility of losing the idyllic future she had envisioned for her family, she must decide whether loving something means clinging tightly or letting go. A new classic from the author of Oprah's Book Club picks*A Map of the World* and *The Book of Ruth*.

**About the Author**:

Jane Hamilton is the author of The Book of Ruth, winner of the PEN/Hemingway Award for first fiction, and A Map of the World, a New York Times Notable Book of the Year and named one of the top ten books of the year by Entertainment Weekly, Publishers Weekly, the Miami Herald, and People. Both The Book of Ruth and A Map of the World have been selections of Oprah's Book Club. Her following work, The Short History of a Prince, was a Publishers Weekly Best Book of 1998, her novel Disobedience was published in 2000, and her last novel When Madeline Was Young was a Washington Post Best Book of 2006. She lives in and writes in an orchard farmhouse in Wisconsin.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* Commonwealth by Ann Patchett
* Summit by Harry Farthing
* News of the World by Paulette Jiles
* Chasing the North Star by Robert Morgan
* The Houseguest by Kim Brooks

**Discussion Questions**

1. The Lombards comprise a sprawling, complicated family, and the relationships among them are even more complex. How is the concept of family portrayed throughout the book?
2. What effect does making Frankie the narrator have on your perception of the plot?
3. One might describe Frankie as being both surprisingly mature and immature for her age. Why do you think this is? How else would you describe Frankie’s character?
4. How does a rural setting lend itself to this sort of familial, community-based story? What role does the landscape, which Jane Hamilton describes vividly, play in the Lombard’s tale?
5. In many ways, this novel can be viewed as a coming-of-age story. What are some key moments in which Frankie “comes of age”?
6. The question of who will inherit the farm is one of the main conflicts in this book. Do you think that the matter of inheritance is emblematic of some other issue?
7. The relationship between Gloria and the Lombards is very complicated. What do you think prevents genuine feelings between the children and Gloria? Between Nellie and Gloria?
8. “We weren’t just bored with the world; we were bored with ourselves, or we were hardly in our selves anymore. It was hard to tell what was going on. Maybe, if we could remember one little trick about how we used to be, we could get there, get back, as if we ourselves were a country we’d left.” How does this quote relate to some of the book’s main themes?
9. Frankie often has incredibly strong feelings and opinions toward those around her. Analyze Frankie’s relationships with other key characters, such as William, her father, Amanda, and May Hill.
10. How does the bond between Frankie and her brother, William, evolve throughout this book?
11. How does Frankie view love? Does it change? If so, how?
12. What do you think makes the Lombards “excellent”?