A BOOK COMPANION



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Questions for *Discussion*

1 Merritt and Ames meet as eight-year-olds. Who were they at that age? Who were you at that age? Do you relate more to Merritt or to Ames? In what ways? Did you continue to relate to that character as the story progressed?

2 On page 28, at the end of the day, Addy asks the girls if they've been properly loved and properly neglected. What does she mean by this? Are both important to the raising of children? What was the ratio of love to neglect in your own childhood and what were the ramifications?

3 As an adult woman, Merritt comes to understand that she was the truest version of herself as a child and to recognize that as she veered from that version, she lost herself. How do our childhood selves inform who we are as adults. Were you the truest version of yourself as a child? Have you experienced the loss of your true self?

4 In some ways, Merritt and Ames' lives are quite traditional. In other ways, they are quite progressive. Can you point to examples of both? In what ways was Merritt bound by convention and expectations and in what ways was she not? How did Ames' life fall within societal paradigms and in what ways did it not? Was this important to their individual and shared stories? How so?

5 Explore the arc of each of the main character's lives. How has each of their separate childhoods affected who they became? Explore the arc of the girls' friendship. How has the friendship affected who they became?

6 Discuss the relationships between Merritt and Raymond and Ames and Monty? How do the characters of Raymond and Monty reflect who Merritt and Ames are?

7 Throughout the novel, Merritt struggles to find happiness though she has moments of it in her interactions with Ames, Raymond and Atlas, in her ventures into nature and in her career. Why is happiness not lasting for her?

8 Both Merritt and Ames, and Raymond too, struggle with identity. Can you describe the struggle each has. Where does it come from? How do they deal with it? Are they successful?





9 Nature plays a crucial role in the book, almost becoming a character in the drama. What role does nature play in the unfolding of the story? Describe how each of the characters relates to nature. How do you relate to nature? What has it meant to you? How do lives lived in deep connection to nature differ from lives which are removed from nature?

10 The arrival of Merritt and Raymond's son Atlas was a pivotal point in the novel. What does he mean to each of the characters and how would things between them have been if he hadn't arrived?

11 On p. 307, Ames says that she and Merritt were assigned to each other? What do you think the author meant by this? Have you experienced a relationship that felt assigned, perhaps a soul sisterhood? Can you share how it unfolded and what it meant to you?

12 What has been the impact of female friendship on your life? How has it shaped, comforted, challenged, and supported you?



13 How does Merritt need Ames? How does Ames need Merritt? In the context of this relationship, and reflecting on your own relationships, how would you characterize healthy versus unhealthy need?

14 Why does the relationship between them endure? What role does forgiveness play? What role does acceptance play?

15 Although Merritt and Ames are of different races, race, as a theme, is not prominently explored in this book. Why do you think the author chose this approach?

16 In the novel, the risks and rewards of motherhood are heightened. What are the risks and rewards for the characters and for you? Where you prepared for the demands of motherhood? In what ways do women who are, by choice or circumstance, childless birth and mother and otherwise create in the world?

17 In *Land Sister Sky*, the phenomenon of family is inherited, created and, as Ames says on page 307, sometimes assigned. Explore how the characters experience family. How have you experienced family?

18 What do the words “Land”, “Sister”, and “Sky” symbolize in the novel?

19 Why did Merritt go to the desert the first time? Why did she go the second time?

20 When Merritt was in the desert the second time, collapsed onto her blanket, “*she sensed the presence of a being, a version of herself that was steady, aware, and curious*”. This begins the experience that changes everything for her. How would you describe the experience Merritt had on her return to the desert? How did it change her? Did any part of the experience resonate with you? Have you ever had a mystical or inexplicable experience like this? What were the conditions of it? How did it change you?

21 The author describes *Land Sister Sky* as a heroine’s journey. What makes the characters’ lives heroic? How does the heroine’s journey compare and contrast with the hero’s journey? Do you, or can you, relate to your own life as a heroine’s or hero’s journey? What has made your life heroic? Are all lives heroic?