

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1

The North Carolina marsh where Kya lives has long been a sanctuary for outsiders. How does this setting shape the novel? How does growing up in this isolation affect Kya? In what ways does her status as an “outsider” change how others see her?

2

Why does Kya choose not to go back to school? Do you think she makes the wrong decision? How does Kya’s lack of formal education shape her vision of the world? Would her character be different if she had gone to school?

3

After Jodie and Pa leave Kya alone, she becomes close to Jumpin’ and Mabel. Why are these two adults drawn to Kya? What do they teach her about the world? Do you agree with Jumpin’s decision to protect Kya from social services (p. 110) and to encourage her to live alone in the marsh? Why or why not?

4

Why do you think Kya’s mother leaves in the beginning? Do you agree with her decision?

5

Kya often watches the other young people from town—she even nicknames them “Tallskinnyblonde, Ponytailfreckleface, Shortblackhair, Alwayswearspearls, and Roundchubbycheeks” (p. 80). What does Kya learn from observing these girls? Why do you think she keeps her watching secret? Do you agree with Kya’s secrecy?

6

How is womanhood explored throughout the novel? What does being a woman mean to Kya? How does she relate to the other women in Barkley Cove?

7

Discuss Kya’s relationship with Tate. How does Tate’s understanding of Kya change over time? Is Tate a good partner for Kya? Why or why not?

8

Tate’s father tells him that poems are important because “they make ya feel something” (p. 48). What does poetry mean to Tate? What does it mean to Kya? How does poetry help Kya throughout the novel?

9

On page 142, Kya watches the fireflies near her shack, and notices that the females can change their flashes to signal different things. What does this realization mean to Kya? What does it teach her about relationships? How does this lesson influence Kya’s decisions in the second half of the novel?

10

Discuss how Kya’s observations of nature shape her vision of the world. Do you think these lessons adequately prepare her for life in Barkley Cove? Do you think human society follows the same rules as the natural world? Should it? Why or why not?

11

Is Chase a different kind of man than Tate? How are they different? Is one man better? Do you think that their differences are biological or learned? How does Kya see each man?

12

In the end of the novel, Kya thinks “Most of what she knew, she’d learned from the wild. Nature had nurtured, tutored, and protected her when no one else would. If consequences resulted from her behaving differently, then they too were functions of life’s fundamental core” (p. 363). What does she mean? Do you agree with her philosophy? What do you think it means to be a good person? Do you think Kya is a good person? Why or why not?

13

Were you surprised by the verdict in the Chase’s murder trial? What about by the ending of the novel? Do you agree with Tate’s final decision? Why or why not?