



The River at Night

READING GROUP GUIDE

This reading group guide for *The River at Night* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

INTRODUCTION

When her best friend, Pia, suggests a girls' trip to the mountains, Winifred Allen isn't exactly in the position to say no. After the loss of her beloved brother and her husband's abandoning her for a younger woman, she desperately needs the vacation—even if it's a white-water rafting trip through Maine's desolate Allagash Wilderness. Four women pack up and go on what they know will be a challenging—but also hopefully fun and refreshing—trip, only to find themselves thrust into a scene out of a horror film. A freak accident leaves the group stranded without supplies or any means of contacting the outside world; with no raft to get them downriver, they're forced to find their way through the woods. But Wini and her friends soon realize that the kindness of strangers cannot always be trusted, and their worst nightmares suddenly become realities.

With twists and turns as unpredictable as the river itself, *The River at Night* is a breathtaking thriller that forces us to consider how one survives when nothing—and no one—can be trusted.

TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "The woods on either side grew dense, impenetrable, alive with their own logic and intelligence" (page 38). Discuss how nature, specifically the woods and the river, act as a character in the novel.
2. The book opens with a quote by Henry David Thoreau. Consider the quote in relation to Simone and Dean, as well as the relationships between Pia, Rachel, Sandra, and Wini. Why do you think the author chose to start the novel with this quote?
3. Concerns about aging and the passing of time come up frequently in *The River at Night*. Why do you think age becomes a factor in Pia's encounter with Rory? Why does age matter in terms of Rory's expertise as a guide? Discuss how age plays a role in the novel and within your own lives.

4. The women use Pia and Rory's sexual encounter to unearth some frustrations they have with one another. Discuss the strength of their bonds and how a trip like this may have forced them to reconcile previous tensions more than a less stressful vacation would have.
5. Wini, Pia, Rachel, and Sandra have long been friends—but they have strikingly different personalities. Which of the women do you relate to the most? The least? Discuss the reasons as a group.
6. On page 51, the characters learn that the river is largely on public property. Sandra goes so far as to say, "Nobody owns a river, right?" Is there an underlying message about conservation and environmentalism in the novel? Discuss what other ways a river, forest, or public park might be "owned."
7. Wini, Rachel, Sandra, and Pia have experienced heartache in many different ways. Whose heartache do you relate to the most? The least?
8. In Chapter 7, just before the women truly commence their trip, Wini remembers her last camping experience. Discuss how the loss of her brother affects Wini's life and how this flashback weaves its way into the rest of the novel.
9. Discuss the two major deaths in this novel. How are they different? What strikes you most about Rory's passing? About Sandra's? Do you think that either could have been prevented?
10. As the antagonist of the story, Simone can be seen as ruthless, deadly, and potentially crazy. One could argue, however, that Simone is just another survivor in the novel. Do you think the author means for her to be more than the villain? Why or why not?
11. "This raft—any raft—flips, and when it does, you have to be prepared. You get no warning. You need to always be ready to be upside down and in that water" (page 125). Discuss what it means to be prepared. Which of the women would you trust most to help should you find yourself lost in a similar situation? Which qualities do you believe are most necessary for surviving in the woods?
12. When the trip is over, the women attempt to get back to normalcy. Wini, however, becomes legal guardian over Dean. Does her decision surprise you?
13. Traveling with a group (or a partner) can often strengthen a friendship. Do you think the trip brought these women closer together? Why or why not?
14. Have you ever been in a situation where you say yes to something—even while feeling fearful or deeply distrustful—because you want to be part of a group? What has been the result?
15. *The River at Night* references loneliness many times, especially in the context of female friendships. Do you feel that the nature of your close friendships has changed over the years? If so, why, and how have you coped with these changes?
16. Fear plays a big role in this book. A natural survival mechanism, fear speeds our reaction times, energizing the muscles for a swifter escape. But what about the role of fear in modern life? Does it ever play a negative role?
17. What is your relationship with nature? Fearful, comfortable, awe-inspired, disgusted, indifferent? Has it changed over the years? If so, in what ways?

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Consider reading Ruth Ware's *In A Dark, Dark Wood* for your next book group. Discuss the themes of good and evil and surviving the unexpected in both novels. Which book is more believable?
2. *The River at Night* opens with a quote by Henry David Thoreau. Consider reading poetry by Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert Frost, or Elizabeth Bishop. Keeping their poems in mind, consider the role New England's landscape plays in this book.
3. Plan your own girls' trip to the woods. Find a local hiking trail, white-water rafting course, or campsite. Before you go, discuss each group member's strengths and how they will be useful throughout the course of the trip.
4. Connect with Erica Ferencik on her website and Twitter.