

West With Giraffes Book Group Questions



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"West with Giraffes" by Lynda Rutledge is a captivating novel that blends historical fiction with themes of adventure, survival, and the deep connection between humans and animals. Set during the Great Depression, the story follows the incredible journey of two giraffes across the American landscape, highlighting the struggles of the time and the resilience of the human spirit. Book clubs can greatly enhance the reading experience by discussing the various elements of the novel. This article provides a comprehensive set of questions and themes that can help guide your book group discussions.

Understanding the Characters

One of the most compelling aspects of "West with Giraffes" is its richly developed characters. Examining these individuals can lead to deeper insights into the story's themes and conflicts.

1. Giraffe and Human Connection

- How do the characters' relationships with the giraffes reflect their personal struggles and growth throughout the story?
- In what ways do the giraffes serve as a mirror for the human characters, particularly in terms of vulnerability and resilience?

2. Protagonist's Journey

- Discuss the protagonist, Woodson, and how his character evolves as the story progresses. What are the key moments that define his transformation?
- What motivates Woodson to take on the responsibility of caring for the giraffes, and how does this reflect broader themes of compassion and duty?

3. Supporting Characters

- Analyze the role of supporting characters such as the other caretakers and the authorities involved in the giraffes' journey. How do they contribute to the overall narrative?
- How do the dynamics between Woodson and these characters enhance the story? Are there any notable conflicts or alliances that stand out?

Thematic Exploration

The novel presents a variety of themes that resonate with readers, making it a rich subject for discussion.

1. Adventure and Survival

- What does "West with Giraffes" suggest about the nature of adventure? How does the journey across America symbolize a broader quest for survival?
- How do the characters demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity? Can you identify specific instances where they overcome significant challenges?

2. Historical Context

- How does the setting of the Great Depression affect the characters' lives and decisions? What historical elements are woven into the narrative?
- In what ways does the author highlight the significance of the giraffes' journey within a larger historical framework?

3. Environmental Awareness

- Discuss how the novel addresses themes of wildlife conservation and the relationship between humans and animals. What messages does it convey about the importance of protecting wildlife?
- How do the characters' actions reflect a growing awareness of environmental issues during the time period in which the story is set?

Symbolism and Imagery

The use of symbolism and imagery plays a crucial role in enriching the narrative of "West with Giraffes."

1. Giraffes as Symbols

- Explore the symbolism of the giraffes in the story. What do they represent for the characters and society as a whole?
- How does their journey mirror the struggles and aspirations of the American people during the Great Depression?

2. Landscapes and Settings

- Analyze how the various landscapes encountered during the journey contribute to the overall mood of the novel. What do these settings reveal about the characters' emotional states?
- Are there particular settings that stand out for their symbolism or significance? Discuss their impact on the narrative.

Discussion of Key Events

Certain pivotal events in "West with Giraffes" propel the story forward and shape the characters' journeys.

1. The Departure

- What are the circumstances surrounding the giraffes' departure from the zoo? How does this event set the tone for the rest of the novel?
- Discuss the immediate reactions of the characters involved during this departure. What fears and hopes do they have?

2. Encounters Along the Journey

- Reflect on key encounters the characters have with other individuals during their journey. How do these interactions influence the main characters?
- Identify a moment that significantly alters the trajectory of the journey. What are its implications for the characters and the overall plot?

Motifs and Literary Techniques

Lynda Rutledge employs various literary techniques that enhance the reader's experience and understanding of the narrative.

1. Foreshadowing

- Identify instances of foreshadowing in the novel. How does Rutledge use this technique to build suspense or prepare the reader for future events?
- Discuss how foreshadowing contributes to the overall themes of the story. Does it enhance the reader's engagement with the plot?

2. Narrative Structure

- Analyze the narrative structure of "West with Giraffes." How does the author's choice of perspective influence the storytelling?
- What impact does the pacing have on the emotional weight of the story? Are there moments where the pacing enhances the tension or excitement?

Personal Reflection and Connection

Engaging with literature often sparks personal reflections and connections to the reader's own life experiences.

1. Relating to the Characters

- Which character did you find most relatable, and why? How did their experiences resonate with your own life?
- Discuss any moments in the novel that prompted you to reflect on your own values or beliefs. What lessons did you take away from these reflections?

2. Impact of the Story

- How did "West with Giraffes" change or reinforce your views on wildlife conservation and environmental issues?
- In what ways did the novel inspire you to think about adventure, risk-taking, or facing challenges in your own life?

Conclusion

"West with Giraffes" by Lynda Rutledge is not just a story about two giraffes; it is a poignant exploration of human emotions, societal challenges, and the beauty of connection with nature. Engaging in thoughtful discussions with your book group can deepen your understanding and appreciation of the novel. The questions provided above can serve as a guide to facilitate rich, meaningful conversations that will enhance the reading experience and foster a greater appreciation

for the themes and characters within this remarkable tale.

By sharing insights, perspectives, and personal connections, book club members can create a vibrant dialogue that celebrates the power of storytelling. As you embark on your journey through "West with Giraffes," allow these questions to guide your discussions and lead to new discoveries about the text and yourselves.

Frequently Asked Questions

What themes are explored in 'West with Giraffes'?

'West with Giraffes' explores themes of adventure, resilience, and the bond between humans and animals, as well as the impact of the Great Depression on American society.

How does the setting influence the characters' journeys in 'West with Giraffes'?

The setting, which spans across the American landscape during the 1930s, influences the characters' journeys by presenting both physical and emotional challenges, shaping their growth and relationships.

What role do the giraffes play in the story?

The giraffes serve as a symbol of hope and innocence, representing the fragility of life and the need for compassion in a world filled with hardship and uncertainty.

How does the author use historical context in 'West with Giraffes'?

The author weaves historical context into the narrative by incorporating real events and societal issues of the 1930s, such as the Great Depression and the rise of the circus, enhancing the authenticity of the characters' experiences.

What is the significance of the relationship between the protagonist and the giraffes?

The relationship between the protagonist and the giraffes highlights themes of empathy and connection, showcasing how caring for another being can lead to personal growth and understanding.

How does 'West with Giraffes' address the concept of family?

'West with Giraffes' addresses the concept of family by exploring chosen family dynamics, as the characters form deep bonds through shared experiences and challenges, illustrating that family can be defined beyond biological ties.

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