

Book Club Questions for Gaining Daylight: Life on Two Islands

"Writing is...that oddest of anomalies: an intimate letter to a stranger."

-Pico Iyer

I love book clubs because they combine so many of my favorite things—reading, talking about books, seeing friends and being reminded of the insights and points of view that make these women so dear to me, and sometimes even dessert or wine. I occasionally wish that more of the women in my book club had time to actually have *read* the book, but since most of us don't see one another as often as we'd like, we usually end up talking about many things that aren't book-related. And there's value in that too, in catching up and commiserating and celebrating together. These ideas for book club questions aren't as traditional as those for a novel, though honestly, sometimes the suggested novel questions about characters and plot are hard to discuss because you read the book five months ago and you've already forgotten who that character even was. My hope is that these questions spark some good conversation between good friends.

1. "December" is about the loss of a childhood friend as much as it is about Old Harbor. What friendships influenced you as you were growing up? How does loss affect our memories of a place or a period of time?

2. Many of these essays explore the good and bad of a region like Kodiak, Alaska, and our choices to live where we do. Do you feel that landscape, seasons, or weather shape us as people? What season sustains you and why? Has this always been the case? What place do you think of as your true geography?

3. In essays like "The Simple Life," "Unsinkable," and "Cardinal Points," the author grapples with the responsibilities of a new way of life and also envies the knowledge that her husband grew up with. Do you feel equal in your roles and work as a partner? Do you mind?

4. What does it mean to "belong" to a place or community? What do we gain by staying put? By leaving? What are the unique challenges or joys of your own community?

5. An aunt, after reading the book, wrote that she was reminded of the isolation of being a young, new mother in a city in California. The isolation that felt imposed by a remote island may have been as much the challenges and demands of being a new mother. What has surprised you or stretched you most as a parent or partner? Do you feel that you've given things up to be the parent or partner you are now? What have you gained?

6. Already, the voice of some essays written three years ago feels as if it was written from a different life. How does perspective change as we accommodate ourselves to different stages of our lives? How much does that affect our voice? What stays constant in our perspectives as we age?

7. Writing "A Lake by Any Other Name" and "The Outlaws of Amook Island" felt a little like solving small mysteries. If you set out to answer a question, what might it be?

8. "Fifteen Times Over the Bridge" began as a need for space and thinking time. Where do you find a meditative space for yourself?

9. Writing nonfiction sometimes means sharing fears or admitting to personal details like depression in order to write honestly about an experience. Has there been a time you were able to relate to someone by risking or sharing something personal? Have you ever found comfort in a piece of writing or an unexpected shared experience?

10. Which essay did you find easiest to relate to and why? What did you empathize with despite possible differences in age and life style?

11. Imagining your home from the perspective of someone who lived here 100 or 200 years ago, what do think their lives would have been like? How have things changed or remained unchanged? What experiences do you still share? What elements of that history do you find most interesting?

12. Many of these essays reflect on small town life and the way it changes or stays the same over time. Besides family, are there any constants (people, things, places) in your life that you trace back to childhood which have managed to remain largely the same?

If your bookclub comes up with new ideas, please share, and thank you so much for reading.