



Swimming in the Moon

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ISBN: 9780062202239

Questions for Discussion

1. Lucia and Teresa's life in Naples had its advantages and challenges. In what ways would Lucia's life have been different if she and Teresa weren't forced to leave?
2. When they leave Italy, Lucia and Teresa are told: "You can be who you want to be in America." True?
3. How does the immigrant experience today compare with that described in *Swimming in the Moon*? Are there other ways in which we are "immigrants" besides the literal moving to a new country?
4. Lucia has a deep emotional connection with Irena, even though they do not share language fluency. What does this say about Lucia and, more generally, about the way that people from different cultures can connect?
5. Lucia earns money by "scribing," writing letters for fellow immigrants. In the process, she often passes on what are essentially lies about their lives. Why? Lucia also lies to the countess in her letters. Why?
6. What sets Lucia apart from the other immigrants in her neighborhood? What do you think Lula means when she says that Lucia "wants so much"? Have you ever felt that you wanted more than you were supposed to want?
7. Teresa's absence while she is on the vaudeville circuit and her emotional and mental problems deprive Lucia of a sustaining maternal figure and ultimately make Lucia her mother's caretaker. How does Lucia compensate for this loss?
8. In America, Lucia's thoughts often return to her life in Naples. What various functions do you think these memories fulfill as she comes to adulthood?
9. How does Teresa's beautiful voice both divide her from and bind her to Lucia? What does the voice do and not do for Teresa? How does Lucia develop her own voice?
10. What challenges do workers in the novel face? How do they compare with those facing workers today?
11. What factors drive Lucia to take up the issue of workers' rights so passionately and endure so many sacrifices for the strike, even when the worker community is often bitterly divided?
12. Lucia learns that only eight in one hundred Americans in her time have high school diplomas. Far fewer, of course, went to college. Graduation has a variety of meanings for Lucia. Can you discuss some of them? Yet, toward the end of the novel, formal education becomes less crucial. Why?
13. What draws Lucia and Henryk together? What pulls them apart? Compare their evolving relationship with that of other couples in the novel: Elisabetta and Paolo, the Reillys, Yolanda and Charlie, Giovanna and Frank.
14. Lucia vividly recalls a line from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "The mind is its own place and in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." How does this line relate to Lucia and Teresa's circumstances and to all of our lives?
15. While the past century has brought profound changes in the treatment of mental illness, in what way is Teresa and Lucia's experience timeless?
16. What is the significance of the title, *Swimming in the Moon*? What image does it conjure for you?
17. Why did you or your group choose to read *Swimming in the Moon*? What did you take away from reading the novel?