

# ***Skyward***

## **Reader's Guide**

1. SKYWARD is a novel of healing and transformation. This theme is rooted in the novel's setting: a rehabilitation center for birds of prey. When the hero, Harris Henderson, introduces the center to the heroine, Ella Majors, he tells her, "Our goals here at the center are to observe, heal and release." Can you trace how the goals for the raptors were also thematic goals accomplished for the human characters, Harris and Ella? Marion and Brady?

2. At the novel's beginning, Harris believed that there was an intimate connection with birds that only rare individuals, such as shamans, possessed. Yet, at the novel's end, as he was about to release another bird, we see that Harris has reached a new understanding about this connection. What was this understanding and who or what helped him to reach it? How has this understanding "freed" him and changed his life?

3. Throughout the novel, the heroine, Ella, prides herself on making moral choices. Yet, at a turning point in the story, Ella makes the critical decision — against even her own inner arguments—to have an affair with a married man. After making this choice, fate later punishes her and forces her into an even more heart-rending decision. What was this punishment and her subsequent decision? What action did she take? Was this final decision a moral one? What is her reward at the novel's close?

4. The white rooster played an important role in the novel, in particular for the character, Brady. What symbol did he portray and discuss his importance in the story.

5. The tent-pole figure around which other characters hinge in this novel is Lijah Cooper. He is a character with depth and knowledge not readily apparent. Like many other wise characters, such as Obi Wan in Star Wars or Lovie Rutledge in *The Beach House*, he guides the searching young toward the path of fulfillment. Discuss how Lijah acted as a guide in *Skyward*. Can you cite other "wise" characters in other books you've enjoyed?

6. The heroine, Ella Majors, traveled to the south from the north seeking warmth in climate, yet she arrives in the lowcountry of South Carolina in the winter. Discuss the change of seasons, the greening and flowering of the landscape and the migration/nesting patterns of the wildlife with the obvious parallel of what is happening internally to this initially rather staid and, at times, cold character.

7. A subplot of the story involved young Marion's ability—or lack of ability—to play. Tied in with this is the broadly discussed issue of the American Pediatric Association's warning against excessive television watching and its deleterious effects on children. Do you feel that the father, Harris's, initial difficulty with playing with his own child is common among fathers today?

**8.** The wild birds in the novel are almost characters themselves. Discuss the role of the following birds in the novel and their impact on the characters.

- Santee, the bald eagle.
- The Tweedles, the vultures
- PEFA 14, the peregrine falcon
- The white rooster

**9.** The hero, Harris Henderson, spent his lifetime rescuing and taking care of others. Even his career choice involves the rehabilitation of raptors. At a critical scene at the novel's end, Fannie screams, "You can't save me. I don't want to be saved!" Discuss this dilemma then, compare it with the final scene in the hospital between Ella and the paramedic.

"He couldn't have made any other choice," she said softly. "It is who he is."

"I don't know about that," the paramedic replied in his brusque manner. "I've seen this kind of thing over and over again, where some guy rushes in to save someone. And I always wonder. Does the man make the choice? Or does the choice make the man?"

Do you think Harris changed this aspect of his personality by the novel's end, or not?

**10.** The plight of birds of prey is depicted both throughout the story and with more pertinent information at each chapter heading. Did you feel you learned about birds of prey in this novel? Were you inspired to learn more?