

The Four Seasons

Reader's Guide

1. The complicated relationship between sisters offers opportunities for both intimacy and estrangement. Whether the relationship was close, or conflicted, or somewhere in between, that life-long bond contributes to who we are. Discuss the impact of birth order and parental favoritism in sibling relationships.
2. Sisters know one another from the nursery. Yet, some sisters get stuck in there, refusing to see their sister as the adult person she has become. How did the Season sisters view each other at the opening of the story? Can family members stop relating to anachronistic images and relate to the person living in the present?
3. The emotions and memories of the Season sisters were locked in a time capsule. How can having a shared history help sisters overcome the sorrows and disappointments of childhood? Discuss how the grief and guilt they experienced in childhood was later expressed in shame, terror, pent-up rage
4. Jillian was pregnant in 1973. How would her options be different as a pregnant high school girl today? How might the reactions to her situation by her family, friends, and community be different?
5. Older sisters are often tapped to help raise younger children. What are the limits of a child's responsibility in child care? What impact does it have on her relationships with her siblings? Do adult responsibilities rob the child of the innocence of youth?
6. If you created a time capsule today, what would you put in it?
7. Jillian's pregnancy was a taboo subject in the Season family. No one was allowed to openly discuss it. Yet after Merry's death it was revealed that each sister, even Merry, knew all along. Later, the past relationship between Jillian and Dennis bubbled under the surface but was never acknowledged. Discuss how and why families often ignore the big pink elephant in the middle of the room.
8. The search for Spring was a metaphor for the women's search for the hopes and dreams of the young girls they once were. Discuss whether you believe the young, androgynous, fearless, girl you once were still lives within you. How did the four Season sisters help each other rediscover their authentic identity?
9. Each of the Season daughters received a nickname to correspond with their unusual last name. What clues do the names offer regarding the characters' personalities? Discuss the impact names and/or nicknames have on our lives. Do you feel names can influence a child's later interests or career? I.e.: a dentist named Dr. Sweet.

10. On page 27, an elderly woman referred to Einstein's theory of relativity. "How different observers can describe the same event differently." Later in the novel, on page 334, Jillian brings up the wise old woman's words to her sisters and adds, "We each have our own version of what happened in the pool that day. And even though they are different, each one is valid." Discuss the evolution of the sister's confrontation with, and acceptance of, Merry's accident in the pool. Are there incidents in your own family history that elicit conflicting narratives?