

This reading group guide for *Time is a River* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

## **Introduction**

Recovering from breast cancer and reeling from her husband's infidelity, Mia Landan flees her Charleston home to heal in the mountains near Asheville, North Carolina. She seeks refuge in a neglected fishing cabin belonging to her fly-fishing instructor, Belle Carson, who inherited the cabin, which once belonged to a grandmother she never knew — the legendary fly fisher and journalist of the 1920s, Kate Watkins, whose life fell into ruins after she was accused of murdering her lover.

While using the cabin as her summer sanctuary, Mia discovers Watkins' journal. The inspiring words written by the woman she never knew finally lure Mia from her shell to connect once more with the world around her. As she learns to fish, she uncovers secrets that span generations—secrets that have the power to change not only her life, but the lives of those in her new community.

## **Topics & Questions for Discussion**

1. What does the title, *TIME IS A RIVER*, represent for you? What characteristics do the passing of time and the flowing of the river share? Why did the river come to mean so much to Mia?
2. The road to healing does not always follow a straight course. Often emotional healing takes two steps forward and one back in a circuitous route to recovery. The opening of the book reflects that backwards and forward movement. Cite the small steps forward Mia takes and the subsequent setbacks as she gradually gains strength and purpose. Discuss how the back-and-forth movement of casting symbolizes this pattern of healing.
3. Mark Nepo's poem, "Holding Each Other Up" opens the novel. Discuss how this poem is significant to the story.

4. Discuss Mia's relationship with her sister Maddie. How is Maddie like a mother to Mia; how is she like a sister? How like a friend? What is the difference?

5. At the start of the novel, Mia is in need of rescue and Belle is there for her. How do their roles reverse by the end of the summer? Discuss how friendships are strengthened when each person both gives and takes.

6. Did you notice that important events seemed to happen during a downpour? Being that nature was so important to Mia, could this have been nature's way of acting as an actual character in the story? Discuss how nature affected the plot.

7. When it is time to leave the cabin at the story's end, Mia "[breathes] deep as if she could somehow absorb the soul of the cabin to carry with her" (Pg 360). In what ways does the cabin have a soul and a spirit? Have you ever felt that a place or an object has a personality or a soul?

8. When Mia begins exploring the cabin she finds not only Kate's diaries, but an armoire filled with treasures : hand-painted china, priceless silver, split bamboo fishing rods, and beautiful clothes (page 45). If you were to fill a hope chest today, with your most prized possessions, what would you include? What would these things say about you should somebody find them 50 years from now?

9. Discuss Mia's relationship to her body throughout the course of the novel. On page 49 the narrator tells us that Mia felt as betrayed by her body as she did by Charles. How does her time in Watkin's Mill affect her feelings toward her own body? Has she made peace? How has Stuart played a role in this?

10. Kate and her granddaughter Belle have quite a bit in common, even though they've never met. A love of fly-fishing "ran through their bloodline as sure and strong as the currents in a river" (Pg 106). Do you think preferences like this are innate or learned? What hobbies or preferences do you think you have inherited from a relative?

11. Mia learns much of Kate Watkins' history directly from the people in town—through stories passed down through generations, or from Kate's old friends who are still around to share. How does this technique of telling the story via an oral history affect the credibility of the narrative? In an age in which almost any information you could dream of is available at the click of a mouse, how does the unraveling of the history of Kate and of Watkin's Mill through hard-earned research, from first hand sources, seem more credible?

12. Mia nicknames the giant, and elusive, rainbow trout "Mr. Big." On page 165 she thinks, "Mr. Big was as ancient as the river he swam in, wise and wary. At what price wisdom, she wondered? Had that big trout ever felt the prick of steel in his mouth?" What do Mia and Mr. Big have in common? How does Mia's relationship to him develop? Why do you think she still has not caught Mr. Big by the end of the novel?

13. When Mr. Pace tells Mia the story of DeLancey's disappearance and the trial that followed he says, "People walked into the room saying 'poor Kate' and walked out saying 'poor Camilla.' In matters of the heart, sympathy usually goes to the wronged wife" (Pg 309). Being a wronged wife herself, how do you think Mia maintained her feelings of kinship with Kate after learning she was having an affair with a married man? Do you think Kate's story helped Mia to see her own divorce in a new light?

14. "Genes have no claim on love" (Pg 362). By the end of the novel Mia feels love toward Kate, and toward Belle. Are there any women in your life who have been so meaningful to you that they feel like family? Who has been like a sister to you? Who like a grandmother?

15. "Each step she took into the woods was a step away from her old life. Was it any wonder great fairy tales took place in enchanted forests?" (pg. 90) Classic fairy tale structures are included in the novel. Find examples and discuss each: 1) the old wise woman 2) the magical hut or sanctuary 3) feminine solidarity 4) dressing as a male 5) a caring lover 6) transformation 7) a restored, renewed world order.