

This reading group guide for *The Beach House* 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

Caretta Rutledge thought she'd left her Southern roots and troubled family far behind. But an unusual request from her mother -- coming just as her own life is spinning out of control -- has Cara heading back to the scenic Lowcountry of her childhood summers. Before long, the rhythms of the island open her heart in wonderful ways as she repairs the family beach house, becomes a bona fide "turtle lady" and renews old acquaintances with her mother that she will earn life's most precious lessons -- true love involves sacrifice, family is forever and the mistakes of the past can be forgiven.

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1) The novel weaves information about the loggerhead nesting saga with the central themes of the story. Discuss the parallels between what the characters experience in the novel and the following themes:

Return — The loggerhead returns to the beach of her birth to lay her eggs.

Fertility — The loggerhead lays approximately 80-150 eggs in each nest. She nests 2-4 times per season.

Abandonment — After the loggerhead lays her eggs, she returns to the sea, never to return to the nest.

Isolation — The loggerheads are solitary swimmers.

2) The chapter headings provide factual, up-to-date information about loggerheads, with some connection to the action in the chapter. The author did this to provide information for those who wanted it without slowing the pace of the story. Did you

enjoy learning about the sea turtles? Did this knowledge add to your understanding and enjoyment of the story?

3) Child and spousal abuse were issues covered in this story. Which characters experienced abuse in the novel? How did the characters handle abuse in different generations?

4) The South holds many deep memories. These memories include a code of behavior and a set of values that has been passed on through generations. What does Lovie mean when she asks her daughter, Cara, *“Where are you from?”*

5) A rebellious young woman, especially one who desired change rather than the status quo, would find these expectations and memories confining. Discuss Cara’s dilemma as a headstrong eighteen year old girl in Charleston during the 1960s.

6) When Lovie and Cara watch the sea turtle slip away under the water, Lovie says, *“I imagine it’s rather like death. You want to go with her, you’re curious, but to do so you’d have to cross that slender, elusive barrier that separates the two worlds. One step, one final breath, then you’d be floating.”*

Lovie is in the final season of her life. She knows that soon she will indeed be crossing that barrier. How does she prepare for this journey?

7) Read “Consider the Turtle” by Thoreau at the book’s beginning. In it he writes, *“One turtle knows several Napoleons. They have no worries, have no cares, yet has not the great world existed for them as much as for you?”*

Discuss this passage and how it pertains to conservation efforts in the world today. What species are endangered in your region?

8) In the prologue, Lovie reflects on the years when her children were young.

“Stop what you’re doing and observe your children! Lovie wanted to say to the young mother. Quick, set aside your chores and turn your head. See how they laugh with such abandon? Only the very young can laugh like that. Look how they are giving you clues to who they are. Treasure these moments. Savor them.

For they will disappear as quickly as the setting sun. And then, before you know it, you will be like me—an old woman, alone and willing to trade anything and everything for one soft evening such as this with her babies once again.”

This is a deeply emotional appeal that touches a mother’s heart. Time has flown by quickly for Lovie. What regrets does Lovie have and is this common for mothers? In your opinion, was Lovie a good mother? Could she have been better? If so, how?

9) In our society, women have traditionally been the nurturers. Women are most often the caretakers of children, the sick and the elderly. Men tend to offer financial or management help. Usually, the most competent child is the one chosen by the sick parent to be the caretaker. Unfortunately, burnout is most likely to occur in women who don’t seek help. Caregivers who receive help from others have the lowest rates of burnout. How did Cara fall into these patterns? Palmer?

10) When Faulkner accepted the Nobel prize in 1950, he said, *“It is his [the writer’s] privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.”*

Discuss books that have succeeded in following this mandate.