

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. What did you know about the real histories of towns being drowned in “development-induced displacements” prior to reading the book? What ideas or feelings were awakened in you thinking about these true stories while reading?
2. Cassie is terrified to go near the lake, yet she spends her days lovingly restoring objects salvaged from its depths. Why do you think she has devoted her life to this practice? What does it say to you about the ways we are shaped by childhood experiences?
3. What was the significance of the telescopes, and what did they really show to Lark? If you were Lark, would you choose to look through the spyglasses? Why or why not?
4. Lark, Cassie, and June each have a complicated relationship with a parent, whom they both love and yet feel some essential disconnection from. How do they each choose to cope with these relationships? Have you ever had to navigate similar dynamics?

5. June is introduced as a character who has felt pressure to hide parts of herself—like the flowers that grow in her hair. Is the need to hide or reduce some part of yourself a struggle you relate to? How does June’s inner conflict unfold through the story?
6. Each of the three main characters is an inheritor of the history of the lake, with familial roots linking them to the past. How do they each contend with this legacy? Where do you come from, and are there any complexities to the way you feel about your own home?
7. The ghostly fisherman retells part of the biblical story of Moses to June. How does that story function in this novel? What did the fisherman mean when he said, “Sickness came, and Pharaoh didn’t do a single thing. Didn’t lift one finger. Times like that, we do what needs done to save our kin. We let them other people go.”?
8. Bolt spends much of his summer with his old friend Rig. But over the course of the book, the dynamics in their friendship radically shift, culminating in violence on the Fourth of July. How are the larger conflicts of the lake reflected in the teenagers’ shared tumble into violence?
9. How do June and Lark find each other, and what connects them in the novel? Is it possible to carve out spaces of queer joy in fraught landscapes?

10. The Fourth of July provides a pivotal backdrop to some of the book's most climactic scenes. How does patriotism or the State inflect the events/themes of the novel?
11. Was Jeff Daley a bad person? He came to Lake Prosper with ambitions of building up tourism and "saving the town." How did/didn't he bring about his fate?
12. Who was the fireworks man? What role did he play in the lives of the characters of the book? The fireworks man clearly felt a deep affinity to June. In what ways (if any) was June like him, and how was she different?
13. Near the close of the novel, Lark thinks, "The lake and the town below were both real, pressed together...the histories were layered like a spiraling shell... Not every old hurt could be healed. People, like water, had a way of flowing imperfectly on." How does living near or alongside histories affect the way you live your life? Everyone has been hurt before; how do we honor that pain and still find new joys?