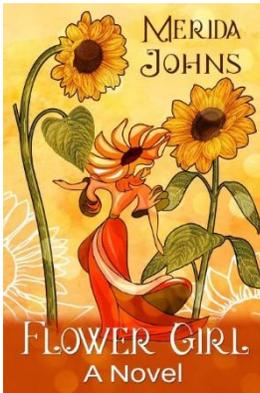


Discussion Questions:

Flower Girl A Novel by Merida Johns



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Numerous themes form the bedrock of the story and characters in *Flower Girl*. Below are several quotes made by the characters in the book. Have each club member choose one to three of these that have the most meaning to them and use the following questions to prompt your discussion.

- What attracted you to this quote? Did the quote connect with you on an emotional level?
- What is the theme underlying the quote? How was this theme used to develop the story and characters?
- Is the quote universal, spanning time and place?
- How well does the quote reflect the values, strengths, or flaws of the character in the story?
- How well does the quote fit into the development of the story? Is it used to introduce tension, conflict, awareness, compassion, empathy, anger, or another emotion in the story?
- Did the quote alter or reinforce your perceptions in any way?

General Questions

If your book club prefers, use the following generic questions for discussion.

- Why was this book selected? Was it the theme, subject matter, author that was of most interest to you?
- Were you immediately drawn into the story? Why or why not?
- Some may categorize *Flower Girl* as a coming-of-age story. But what is the true subject of the story? What is happening below the surface? What feelings, ideas, and meanings are explored?
- What is the commonality or universality of the lived experiences in *Flower Girl*? Were these presented realistically and believably?
- Are there characters you particularly liked or disliked? What values, strengths, flaws, or characteristics brought you to your opinion? What emotional response (love, hate, anger, sympathy, empathy) did you have for the character(s)?
- The author uses several techniques for storytelling, including flashbacks, written letters, internal dialog, journals/diaries. How effective were these techniques?
- How was sense of place used in the story? What impact did specific scenes have on you and why?

- The author uses several embedded metaphors to carry themes through out the story. For example, a highway representing a life journey, North Star representing direction and purpose. What are other metaphors that you saw? How were these used in the story to emphasize the story themes?
- What questions about the story or character haunt you? What mysteries remain unanswered?
- After turning the last page, what was your immediate reaction?

Quotes

Suzana, Chapter 1. My philosophy of life, born from my experience, is that the road is as long as you make it. Pedal slower; it's short and monotonous. Pedal faster; it's longer and more remarkable. Some may say this is life in the fast lane—I prefer "Seize the day."

Robert, Chapter 1. My family's discussions influenced my beliefs for governmental transparency, separation of powers, and freedom of the press and speech as lynchpins in protecting our democracy. Dad was fond of quoting Thomas Jefferson during this period, "**Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,**" he'd say.

Jack, Chapter 1: "It's not about the grades that you receive; it is about what you've learned."

Jack, Chapter 1: "What matters more than grades are the choices you make, good and bad, and what you learn from them."

Suzanna, Chapter 1: I'm a believer in the saying, "What goes around comes around."

Gary, Chapter 2: "Suzanna, noticing and appreciating nature is the groundwork for knowing and respecting yourself."

Craig, Chapter 3: "I think we need to understand what's motivatin' our likes and dislikes. So we find what makes us tick. If we don't figure out why things push our buttons . . . well, we end up gettin' pulled every which way. We're unfilled. Without direction, we never achieve our full potential movin' through life."

Craig, Chapter 3: "Without having self-understanding as a foundation, I would be navigating through life, like before the war, without a compass; I'd never find my North Star."

Craig, Chapter 3: "Suzanna, what I saw in the army made me a believer that life was too precious to squander by being aimless and not living your truth."

Lillian, Chapter 3: "We all make our choices. You'll face the consequences and do fine if you learn from the experience."

Suzanna, Chapter 4: "Sometimes, Suzanna, we must move out of our comfort zone and stand up for what is right."

Craig, Chapter 4: "Snap decisions make poor decisions, unless, of course, you're being chased by a saber tooth tiger."

Craig, Chapter 4: "Deep inside, though, I knew that acting out wasn't going to make me happy. To get better, I needed to know who I was and where I wanted to go. I ended up thinking the best place to start

was to go back to the basics—give myself space and peace and let nature help me free my tangled heart.”

Suzanna, Chapter 4: *Have some compassion for yourself and others; it goes a lot farther in making you happy than indifference or hate.*

Craig, Chapter 4: “In my experience, the last ones are the toughest, Suzanna. During and after the war, I learned that perseverance, pushing forward, was critical in getting my shit together. People don’t succeed by giving up.”

Craig, Chapter 4: “Sometimes, Suzanna, we must move out of our comfort zones to do what is right.”

Craig, Chapter 4: “I knew that I couldn’t succeed by giving up.”

Lillian, Chapter 9: “You have choices in life. You make the decisions and then either reap the good or bad consequences of your actions.”

Jack, Chapter 9: “Suzanna, a good relationship is a partnership. I don’t have a hell of a lot of experience, but what I do know is that partnerships are based on trust, fairness, truthfulness, and acting in ways that show that other people matter.”

Craig, Chapter 11: “To feel better, you need to know who you are and where you’re headed. Begin with the basics—give yourself some space and peace. Change isn’t a single event. It’s a process of many steps.”

Craig, Chapter 11: “Before you can have compassion for anyone, you must have it for yourself. Before you can forgive anyone, you must be able to forgive yourself. And before you can live your truth, you must be true to yourself.”

Robert, Chapter 11: “Anger robs a person of their autonomy, their freedom,”

Suzanna, Chapter 13: *How often do we miss the simple and sublime because we are too stressed looking back or too absorbed looking forward?*

Craig, Chapter 13: “Love begins within you,” he had said. “Without giving love to yourself, you will be empty of it, and there will be nothing to give to others.”

Craig, Chapter 14: “To find my way, my desire to change had to be greater than my desire to stay the same.”

Mel, Chapter 15: “The choice you make now determines your future, Suzanna. Dreams of freedom without action will only remain dreams.”

Jack, Chapter 17: “Are you running away from something, Flower Girl? Or are you running toward something?”

Jack, Chapter 17: “If you’re running from a saber-toothed tiger out of fear and have no destination in mind, what benefit is it? In the end, the tiger gets you. Tiger and fear always win, Flower Girl.”

Robert, Chapter 17: “When you want to help someone, offer a powerful question. Questions deepen a person’s awareness. Questions empower people to make choices and act. That’s how I get to the truth—by asking questions.”

Robert, Chapter 17: “Questions deepen a person’s awareness of their situation and empower them to make choices and act. Don’t be so bold to think you have all the answers! People will pleasantly surprise you if you give them a chance.”

Craig, Chapter 17: “Egotism is a thief that steals your soul piece by piece until there nothing is left.”

Suzanna, Chapter 17: “People don’t change because another wants or wills it—people change because they want to become better.”

Craig, Chapter 17: “Without self-forgiveness, we can never achieve peace of mind—we can never do better because we are always be looking backward. Forgive yourself for not living up to your values. Forgive yourself if you have injured someone else, and then get to town and live a better version of yourself.”

Suzanna, Chapter 17: *“Shame and guilt are traps that keep people stuck. They’re false stories we tell ourselves and others, hoping to absolve ourselves of having to do the hard work to be better.”*

Suzanna, Chapter 18: I better understood my motivations and knew that what is important in life extends beyond titles, money, or status—the joy of life comes from taking advantage of the present and contributing to something bigger than ourselves.

Craig, Chapter 20: “Too often folks get caught up in a false dichotomy, an either this or that trap. There’s usually at least a third good option waiting to be found,” he said.

Eleanor, Chapter 23: Get to know the feel of the yarn with your fingertips. Allow its fidelity to flow through you. Be at one with the animals and the earth that have given you this gift. A happy weaver makes a happy cloth.

Robert, Chapter 24: “When we fail to balance our decisions with emotion and reason, we prohibit our brains from calculating the good or harm of our choices.”

Suzanna, Chapter 24: *Forgive and forget—it’s an enduring sentiment, but I’m confident that we often don’t succeed at either.*

Suzanna, Chapter 24: *Forgiveness is not a solo act. It requires acknowledgment by the abuser of harm caused, and it demands justice and a firm commitment by the abuser to change. Forgetting is a solo act, but injury leaves an indelible mark in the mind and on the body; the memory of the emotional and physical harm brands a person, every bit the same as a hot flat iron stamps a cattleman’s mark.*

Suzanna, Chapter 26: “Coincidences may exist, but alternatives exist within each of these quirks of fate, and the option we pick is not pre-determined.”

Elliott, Chapter 26: “If we give up control and allow people to take things from us that are not theirs, we lose everything.”

Elliott, Chapter 26: “What matters is living each day in the present.”

Elliott, Chapter 26: “Systems theory. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Everything is related. When we subtract one part, it impacts all the others.”

Bob, Chapter 30: “Shame is a dangerous and greedy emotion, Suzanna, that always wants more. You have no shame here. Shame should not have power over your life.”

Elliott, Chapter 30: “Leave the past in the past and the future to the future.”

Elliott, Chapter 30: “Your brain remembers abuse, physical and emotional. It keeps a record, a tally of the hurts. I don’t know how to erase the ledger of abuse, but we should never stop trying.”

Elliott, Chapter 30: “No one, Suzanna, deserves abuse. No one deserves it.”

Elliott, Chapter 30: “What happens after death isn’t a concern for me. The thing that matters is the present and how you conduct yourself every day in helping others live better lives. If you live a moral life, you reap the rewards now. If there is something later . . . well I guess that’s a bonus.”

Elliott, Chapter 31: “Grievance is death, too,” he said. “When we make grievance our traveling companion, it blocks out light, it distorts our perspective, it consumes our hearts until there is nothing left. It is a fool’s dream to believe that grievance, holding a grudge, getting even will fill the hole in ourselves that loss has made.”

Elliott, Chapter 31: Lost time is one thing we can never recover.