

Bellingham Reads

Book Club Kit

Refuge Reading Guide

1. What is the tone of the Prologue; what overall feeling and atmosphere does it have?
2. What does Williams mean when she says she “was drawn further into its essence” and “I chose to stay?”
3. Note the many different aspects of the dream . What do you think the significance of the dream is? What do you think the meaning is of “you have nine months to heal yourself.”
4. What is the significance of memory in this Prologue (and the book as a whole)? What does she mean by “I was left standing with my own memory?” What does she mean by “memory is the only way home”?
5. What does she mean by “This story is my return.” What kind of return? From what to what?
6. How do you respond to “I am spun, supported, and possessed by the spirit who dwells here. Great Salt Lake is a spiritual magnet that will not let me go. Dogma doesn’t hold me. Wildness does.”
7. How does she reinterpret the traditional Christian notions of the Trinity and the Godhead? How do you respond to her ideas? Why?
8. What did the woman from the Department of Energy have no idea about? Why did she have no idea? What is the significance of this story for politics and society?
9. What is the significance of her injury and scar? What is her attitude toward risk? Do you think that is a good attitude? If you do, how do you court risk?
10. What are the qualities of her grandmother Mimi? Why is she significant to Williams? What does she mean by telling William “I am rid of orthodoxy. My advice is do it consciously”?

11. What is her perspective on pain and grief? In what way are dead animals and pumped lake extensions of her family? Why does she say "Grief dares us to love once more?"

12. Is there an ecosocial critique and/or ideal in this essay? If so, what is your assessment of them? Do you agree? Why or why not?

13. How is the experience of terminal illness and death portrayed? How could someone say it "is one of the most spiritual experiences you will ever encounter?"

14. What is Williams's attitude toward the government and her Mormon religion?

15. What is the dream she has – what happens in it? What kind of attitude and values are involved? What does she mean by "genealogy with the earth" and "committing treason against one's soul?"

16. How do you respond to her civil disobedience? Why do you respond that way?

Adapted from study questions by David Landis Barnhill

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