

## The Forest Lover Reading Guide

1. Had you ever heard of Emily Carr before reading *The Forest Lover*? Why do you think an artist who has been considered Canada's national treasure is so little known south of the U.S.-Canadian border? Are you now inspired to know more about her and her work?
2. In *The Forest Lover*, Emily Carr is often referred to as "a woman painter." Do we still use that expression today? Emily struggles against sexism as well as racial prejudice. Which of these two does Emily think is most insidious, and why? Which limited the reception of her art the most? Which limited her life the most?
3. Sophie says that in order to find your "power spirit" you must take risks (p. 103). What risks does Emily take? Who are some women risk-takers today? What risks have you taken in your own life, or do you anticipate having to take, in order to develop yourself more fully? Is there something Emily says or does that can serve as inspiration for you?
4. Why do you think Emily is drawn to native cultures? Even though Emily denies it, do you think it is because, as Frances says, "it's substituting for something in us" (p. 133)? What might Emily be substituting for, or what is she seeking through her encounters with the native cultures of British Columbia?
5. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is present throughout the book. "Oh, such a soul, this Whitman had," Emily says (p. 238). Discuss the connection Emily feels with Whitman's poetry and its importance to and influence on her work.
6. In Part II, Emily has decided to go to Paris. What changes for her there? What influences her there? Later, she says she must leave because she is not herself there. What does she mean? Is this really true? How does place define who we are and influence what we do?
7. Throughout the novel, it seems Emily rejects most chances at intimacy. Why do you think this is? What do you think Emily's true feelings for Fanny involved? Was a love interest there, but denied? Do you think she was ever truly attracted to Claude, the French fur trader? Is it possible for a woman to be a brilliant, dedicated artist and also have successful relationships with family? With lovers?
8. Do you think, as Emily asks on page 137, that "creating yourself is a spiritual act" or a practical one? Is "creating yourself" different today than it was in 1910? If so, how? How have you "created yourself" and what obstacles have you had to overcome?

9. Through Emily's eyes, we see how symbols—the raven, the wolf, Dzunukwa, to name just a few—were so present and powerful in Indian culture. Are symbols as powerful and present today in the modern world? What are some symbols that we see today? Is their function the same or different from those in the native cultures of British Columbia?
10. What/where is your illahee—the land that gives comfort?

Adapted from [www.readinggroupguides.com](http://www.readinggroupguides.com)