

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. We first see Sarah Lucas as she is racing into the Vermont winter woods on the heels of her dog Sylvie. What was your first impression of this seventy-five-year-old woman?
2. What do you think the woods represent to Sarah? How has her relationship to nature changed since her childhood? What caused it to change?
3. Rural Vermont is rugged, poor, and sparsely populated. How do you think this environment has affected Sarah throughout her life?
4. Sarah's long marriage to Charles was mainly happy and successful, but it did have rough periods. How did the two of them weather these times without lingering resentments?

5. After Charles dies, Sarah goes numb, avoids people, and doesn't even cry. What breaks into her suspended state? Once her numbness wears off, does her grief take on new aspects and forms of expression, or does she just set grief aside and get on with things?
6. What do you see as milestones on Sarah's pathway to a new life and perhaps even a new identity? Have you ever reinvented yourself? What were your milestones?
7. On impulse, Sarah takes Charles's old camera with her on a late-winter walk. How does photography help to change the way she sees? What does she examine with her new eyes?
8. Why, over time, does Sarah enjoy taking increasingly puzzling and ambiguous photographs?
9. Charlotte and David respond very differently to Sarah's photographs. How do their responses reflect their relationships with her?
10. Sarah's view of her world is somewhat altered after hearing about the murder of Tess's husband and Mordechai's experiences in Israel. How do these things affect Sarah's actions and assumptions?
11. Why do you think Sarah agrees to take new people into her life? For instance, why Mordechai, and then her granddaughter and the two other teenagers?

12. What enables Sarah's teenage boarders—who had been so unhappy and even angry in their own homes—to calm down in Sarah's?

13. Why do you think it upsets Charlotte when her predictable mother starts behaving unpredictably?

14. What is the basis for the deepening friendship between Sarah and Mordechai?

15. As the seasons change throughout the novel, so do all the characters' lives, both inner and outer. Sarah's changes are the most obvious and dramatic, but which of the other characters' lives changed the most, and which changes were most vivid to you?

16. What might Sarah have done differently in her encounter with Roger? How different might the outcome have been?

17. Throughout this novel we see natural hazards in the form of violent storms, life-threatening cold, and animal predation. We see human hazards such as domestic violence, murder, and warfare. What is the connection? Are humans given to violence or destruction because we are part of nature? Or can we choose otherwise?

18. What would Charles have thought of the Sarah we see at the end of this book?