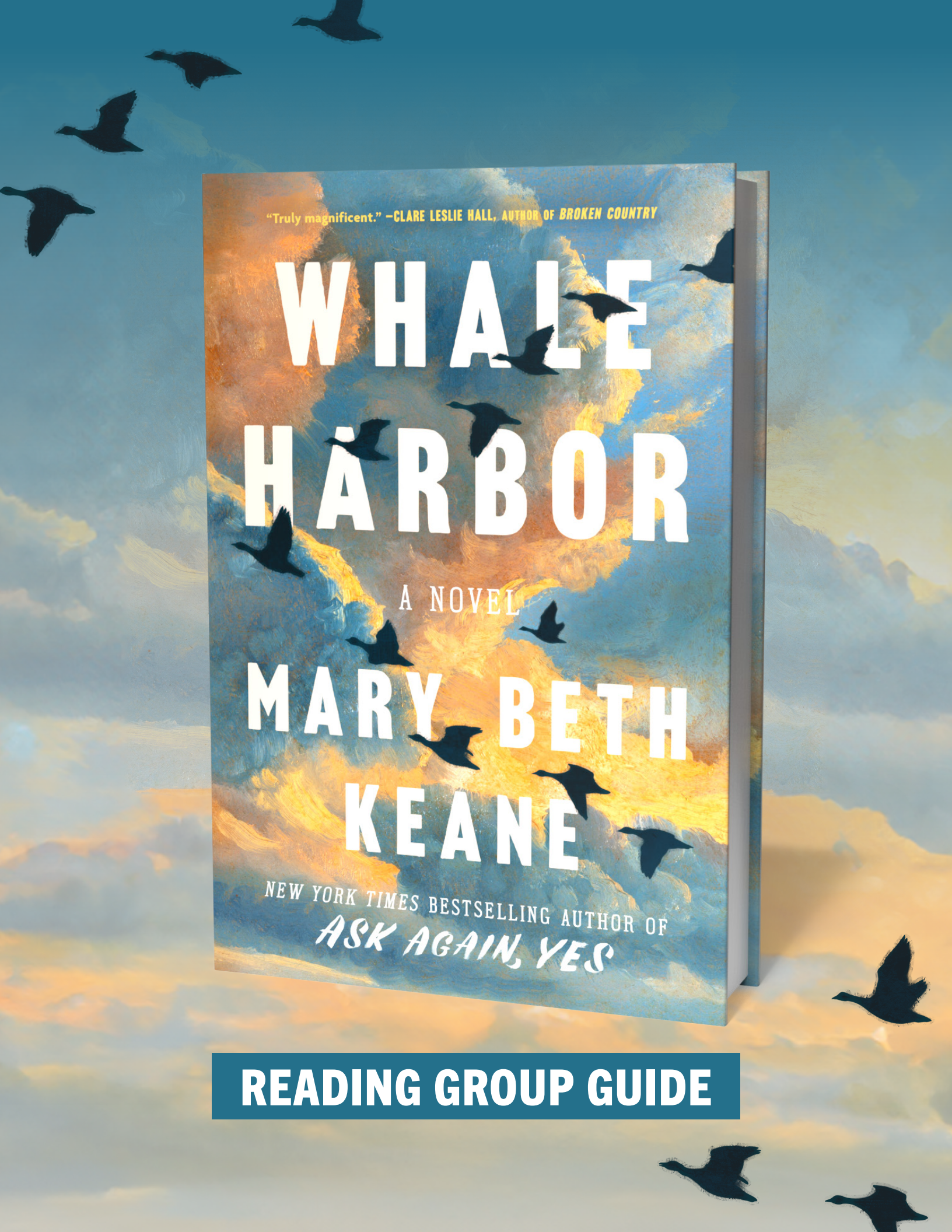


READING GROUP GUIDE

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. The story begins with Mac pushing his younger brother Rian to practice his English in place of Irish. What do these initial interactions tell you about the Cuan and its community?
2. How does meeting Professor Browne—who insists on being called Vincent—shape Mac and his ideas about his future in Ireland?
3. Discuss how Cathal's character develops after their lives are upended. Recall how his presence around his sons changes, especially once he introduces the boys to Nuala.
4. After spending some time in Montana, Mac says he "stopped dreaming of [his brothers]—their nightly drownings and burnings, their cries for help" (page 117). How do you think Mac's life would have been different had he stayed in Ireland?
5. On page 170, Mac learns that Cathal is now regarded as a more dependable, better neighbor than he once was. Instead of feeling proud or relieved about his father's improved reputation, "all it did was bring to mind his mother, a baby in her arms . . . no doubt praying to glimpse her husband cycling toward home." Why do you think Mac feels this way?
6. Mac often compares his time in Montana to the probable loneliness Rian felt after Mac left. How does this guilt shape his adulthood and future relationships?
7. When their brother Vincent arrives in New York, some of the Joyces resent the welcome he is given. Did you think this was justified?
8. While visiting Honnie on page 232, Mac asks if she feels lonely, to which she replies she couldn't be lonesome in the place where she was from. How does Mac feel about the Cuan after so many years away? What does he think of as home?
9. How does the loss of Eamon affect the relationship between the Joyce brothers and reignite the search for Rian?
10. We see Mac's daughter Mary grow up into a strong yet stubborn young woman. Discuss where she gets these traits and if you see any similarities between her and any other Joyce family members.
11. Do you think Cathal's final conversation with Rian changed either of their perspectives about each other and their past?
12. Discuss the symbolism behind the eleven whales who appear at the end.

Enhance Your Discussion

1. Read Mary Beth Keane's novel *Ask Again, Yes*. Are there any similarities in the way the author writes about family and relationships?
2. Irish phrases and words appear throughout the book. What have you learned about how the Irish language differs from English?

