



READING GROUP GUIDE

Hang the Moon

Jeannette Walls

This reading group guide for HANG THE MOON includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

INTRODUCTION

Sallie Kincaid is the fiercely independent, intrepid, and impulsive daughter of Duke Kincaid, the most powerful man in Claiborne County. When the Duke dies unexpectedly, Sallie is suddenly in charge of the family business. In 1920s Virginia, that's bootlegging, but there is more involved than Sallie ever suspected. Old family members and new opportunists make their own claims to the Kincaid fortune, and Sallie's father casts a shadow long after his death. This is a family—and a culture—with dark secrets, each of which Sallie must confront. In *Hang the Moon*, Jeannette Walls tells the story of a young woman navigating a world where legal and illegal don't always match right and wrong. But Sallie Kincaid discovers her own path and triumphs.

TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are two very different epigraphs that open the book: one from Queen Elizabeth I and another from Rex Walls, the author's father. Discuss how these quotes set up your reading experience and how they relate to the overall story.
2. Upon Sallie's return to the Big House, the Duke makes it her job to "bring out the Kincaid" in her stepbrother Eddie (page 44). What does it mean to be a Kincaid? Besides the Duke and Sallie, are there any characters that also display classic "Kincaid" traits?
3. Consider the Duke's phrase "I'll treat you fair, but I won't treat you special" (page 74). What do you think of this principle? How does it show up throughout the story? Are there any moments that contradict this idea?
4. As Sallie grows up, there are several times she can be seen emulating her father. For example, she parrots the way he says "Steady" when trying to teach Eddie to drive the Defiance Coaster. What lessons does Sallie take away from her father? At what point does she come into her own and deviate from his education?
5. Eddie is as much his mother's son as Sallie is her father's daughter. He is withdrawn, intelligent, and soft-tempered. What does this contrast between siblings reveal about the family? What does it reveal about Sallie?
6. The idea of family is hugely important in *Hang the Moon*. How do family bonds influence the events of the novel? Is blood thicker than water, so to speak? What relationships stood out to you the most?
7. Marriage is a major theme throughout the novel, and a big question for Sallie, who is "not sure [she'll] ever want to get married" (page 34). How is marriage represented in *Hang the Moon*? How does marriage differ between the time period in the book and now?
8. Sallie has two love interests: Tom Dunbar, her childhood friend, and Lieutenant Douglas Rawley. How does each man influence her actions? Before the end of the novel, were you rooting for one or the other of these very different men?
9. For much of the book, Aunt Faye seems like a pitiable and weak-hearted character in need of defense. However, we learn more as the story goes on. How does your view of Aunt Faye transform over the course of the novel?
10. Many of the characters in *Hang the Moon* could be described as morally gray. How would you arrange the characters on a moral spectrum from good to bad? Does anyone fall more clearly on one side or the other for you?

11. Abraham Crockett is a man with as much charisma and pride as Duke Kincaid himself, though he does not have the same wealth and power. What does his narrative add to the overall story? What would we lose from the reading experience if Abraham were absent?
12. Sallie cares a great deal about heirlooms. She keeps her mother's moonstone necklace, she secures Jane's sterling silver hairbrush so that Eddie can have "something of his mama's" (page 53), and she acknowledges how much the Kincaid jewels might mean to Mattie. Why do you think Sallie places so much importance on these items?
13. Overcoming long-held grudges and breaking generational curses are key to the plot of *Hang the Moon*. For example, the feud between the Bonds and Kincaids can be traced back to a land dispute between the families' grandfathers. In the face of these conflicts, what does Sallie do that helps her succeed where others have failed?
14. Though Sallie is used to being the biggest fish her side of the pond, Georgette Rheims's wealth blows her out of the water. Georgette dredges up insecurities Sallie never knew she had and shares some harsh truths. Imagine how differently things may have turned out had Georgette never contacted Sallie. Do you think her husband's assessment of her motivations is accurate? Or is there more to the story?
15. Think about all the women in the story—Sallie, Aunt Faye, Jane, Kat, Mattie, Gloria, Georgette, and others—and think about how they either buck or conform to traditional gender roles. How have these women's lives been shaped by their own choices versus the desires of the men around them?
16. At the end of the novel, Sallie has a flashback to a memory of her mother that had been long forgotten, and she wonders if it is truly a memory or just wishful thinking. What do you think? Does it change the conclusions Sallie draws from her experiences one way or the other?

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Jeannette Walls has said that learning how to drive changed women's lives dramatically—sometimes as dramatically as gaining the right to vote. If you drive, imagine your life without the independence that driving provides. To go a step further, try not driving for a day or a weekend and see how it alters your schedule.
2. Sip on some whisky while you read to create that bootlegging atmosphere.
3. There are characters and scenes in the novel inspired by real people and events. Take a look at the research material mentioned in the acknowledgments to supplement your reading!