

Lightning in a Mason Jar

By Catherine Mann

Discussion Questions

1. Does your name hold special meaning for you, or do you feel unattached to it like Winnie? If so, why?
2. Was Winnie being too cautious in holding so tightly to her secret? If so, how much should she have told Bailey Rae, and at what age?
3. What sort of challenges would Winnie have faced if she didn't have her group of friends?
4. Looking back on the women in your life, do you believe there was anyone who felt trapped by circumstance or lack of resources? What are ways we can help others feel comfortable reaching out?
5. How did Bailey Rae grow as a result of her discoveries about Winnie's past?
6. *Lightning in a Mason Jar* touches on several themes, including women's rights, family secrets, the resiliency of women, the resiliency of children, racial tensions, and dementia. Was there one theme that you were particularly drawn to? Why?
7. Russell and Martin both have military combat service in their pasts. How does that influence their subsequent career choices?
 - a. Keith and Bailey Rae experienced similar childhood trauma. Why do you think Bailey Rae grew and Keith continued to struggle?
 - b. Winnie and Thea each enter into committed relationships (Winnie with Russell, Thea with Howard). How do their approaches to happily ever after differ and why?

8. Why do you think Winnie found it so difficult to marry again? Did you empathize with her reluctance?
9. How did the setting of the rural South play into shaping the story?
10. Martin is the only character in the story who is not from the South. How do his observations help showcase regional differences and idiosyncrasies? How has Martin used this relocation to avoid facing past trauma?
11. This book was inspired by the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) of 1974, which took away the barriers women faced with getting credit cards in their own names. Why do you think it took so long for this law to be passed?
12. Winnie thinks in the opening pages, "we women aren't tethered to our names." She views that as something positive, considering she wants to hide her identity. Is there a flip side to this? What do women give up by not maintaining their birth names?
13. It took Bailey Rae some time to discover the darker reasons behind Winnie's friends' seeming eccentricities. How did each of the older characters—Thea, Libby, June—change themselves to adapt to their new lives? What did they each give up?
14. Early in the story, Winnie wonders if she will ever be close enough to the women she meets to learn their real names or their real stories. Do you feel you know your friends' deepest stories? Do they know yours? How does that deepen—or threaten—a friendship?