

***The River's Memory* by Sandra Gail Lambert**
The Book Club Guide

First off, these questions come from me, the author, interviewing myself while I'm thinking of you, the reader. Which is a bit weird. But let's all of us go along with the artifice of it all.

This is a work in progress. E-mail me (sandragaillambert@yahoo.com) with any other questions you think should be included.

General, Overview Questions:

Now that you've read the book what significance do the epigraph quotations by George Eliot and the Queen of Sheba hold for you?

It could be argued that this is a collection of short stories rather than a novel. Why do you think the author considers this a novel?

What is the role of the river throughout the book as a whole? What is the effect of the paragraphs at the beginning of each chapter?

What is the emotional relationship between each of the characters and the river?

How does each character's creative life or their yearning for one manifest?

The author says she wanted to show that DNA is not the only way that women pass on a heritage. What are the ways these characters lives become part of the future?

None of the characters have names until near the end of the novel. Why do you think the author made this choice? How did it effect your perception of them? Did it annoy you?

From My Chest, Dragonfly Wings - 1528

The jarring relationship between creativity and the politics of the day has current implications. How does your creative life fit into your personal world? Into your wider community and nation?

The potter is a member of what we would call the upper class. She is also an artist. She is also disabled. How has this mixture formed her personality?

Cracked Beads - 1858

The author, a white woman, is writing from the point of view of a black man being lynched. What are your thoughts about this?

Discuss the child's mother—her life the best you know it from what the author tells you and from what your own experience or knowledge fills in to the story.

Skeleton Jangle - 1918

Discuss this young woman's yearning for a home—real and imagined.

In writing this chapter the author asked her friends about their first sensations of lust. What was yours?

How much do you know about the 1918 Flu Pandemic, which was also known as the Spanish Flu? (Even though it might have started on a military base in Kansas.) Did you family pass on any stories about it? If they didn't, why not?

Half-Boy - 1932

This character lives in the time between the wars. How are the effects of the last one still present? How does your knowledge of the era add to any foreshadowing of the next war?

Discuss how this character's disability both expands and limits her life. How do you relate this to your own life?

A man in a bowler hat who's bailing his leaky boat appears in a cameo-like way. What's he about?

In a Chamber of My Heart - 1996

The author, who you know is me, right here writing this, is much to emotionally involved in this chapter to think of any detached, third-person questions. You are on your own here. But she (I) will say that the segment below seems to her (me) to be at the heart of things.

"Now, you need to listen. No one remembers my pilot anymore but me and, secondhand, my gal, and soon it will just be her. This is important. Write this down."

Happy Birthday to Me - 2008

Finally, the characters have names. Although, still, not the main character. Why do you think the author changed things up here?

And this main character doesn't die. Why does she choose to live?

What objects and images from earlier times are passed on to this woman?

Ten Thousand Years Ago

Why is this chapter last?

This chapter was written first. It's where the author decided not to name the characters. She just couldn't figure out how to without patronizing them with made up ones like "Thrud" or animals names like "Fierce Beaver." Her reasons for not naming characters changed for the previous, later-in-time chapters, but this is how it started. What other choices made in this first written chapter carried through the rest of the novel?

Do you think it's plausible that people of these times didn't know how babies were made? Remember that there were no domesticated animals. (The author puts a plug in for her side of the argument.)

The Last Cat

The novel used to end with a short, short chapter about the life and death of the last saber-toothed cat. But it was cut. And it needed to be despite the author's fondness for this fierce and tragic cat. Still, it exists in the "outtakes" section of *The River's Memory* website. Enjoy.

