



Discussion Questions

1. Some of the most complex characters in this book are children. Jaime and Byrd are drawn to each other and both have a light and a dark side to them in ways that the adults do not. Why do you think the author chose children to demonstrate the good and the bad in human nature?
2. Naomi is a person who looms large over this family and yet she's not physically present. Explore how Naomi's absence has affected her own family. Would her family's outcome be different if she were alive? If so, how?
3. The family seems frightened of Byrd's magical potential and yet loves and protects her. What is it about Byrd that draws her family to her, despite all the doubt they feel about her actions?
4. Bronwyn and Byrd have a special connection. Do you think the absence of their mothers is what draws them together? If so, why? In what ways do you think this has made them different or similar? In what ways do you think Naomi has affected them? How do they reflect her? Discuss.
5. Byrd says her favorite word is "obtuse," that is, slow to understand. While she seems to dislike when other people are being obtuse, could she just be talking about herself? She knows, or thinks she knows, what is going on around her even as she pretends to turn a blind eye. Discuss.



6. Naomi says Jackson's alcoholism won't kill him, that "pirates don't drown." That's an interesting juxtaposition with her as a mermaid, the siren. Who leads who astray?
7. At the beginning of the novel, Bronwyn is scared to revisit the person she was when she was growing up. Have you had any experiences where you had to revisit bad decisions in your life in order to move forward?
8. The theme of forgiveness is front and center in the narrative. Why is forgiving the people who have hurt us most so crucial to living a peaceful life? Do you think before forgiving one another all the characters ultimately had to forgive themselves? If so, why, and how does this play an important role in allowing them to move forward together?
9. Bronwyn consistently says things such as "Time lies." How do these moments in the novel reflect the transformative power of honesty?
10. How does the setting of the novel influence the narrative arc of the story? The author creates "characters" out of architecture as well as nature. Would the dynamics between the family members be as poignant if this novel were set somewhere else? Discuss.