

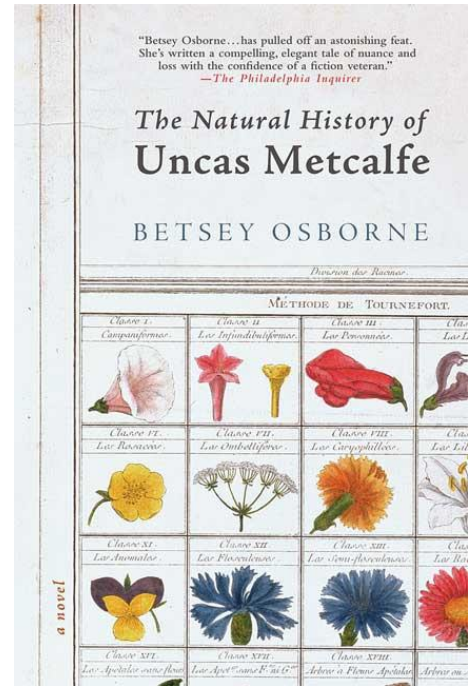
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Natural History of Uncas Metcalfe

By Betsey Osborne

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Natural History of Uncas Metcalfe* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Natural History of Uncas Metcalfe*.

About the Book

Uncas Metcalfe is a sixty-five-year-old botany professor, whose habitat is changing: his wife is ill, his daughter has returned home, and memories of an almost forgotten infidelity are surfacing. When a former student starts making menacing demands, Uncas finds his comfortably obstinate nature at odds with his family's growing impatience and a newfound, terrifying uncertainty.

The Natural History of Uncas Metcalfe follows an unforgettable hero as he struggles to right himself and adapt, even as he approaches the end of his life. Beautifully wrought and wonderfully imagined, the lives and losses of the Metcalfe family will linger in your imagination long after the last page.



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About the Author

Betsey Osborne graduated from Harvard, attended the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and has a master of fine arts from Columbia. She has worked at *Grand Street*, *The New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*. She lives in Cranston, Rhode Island.

Discussion Questions

1. Is Uncas a sympathetic character (do you like him)? Do your feelings toward him change over the course of the book?
2. What characteristics do Uncas and Carl share? How does this make the tension between them more interesting?
3. What does the title mean? What does it mean to tell a person's "natural history"?
4. Why do you think Fauna and Uncas have such a complicated and, at times, antagonistic relationship? How does this play a role in the novel?
5. What part does the town of Sparta play in Uncas's story? Would the story be the same transplanted to a larger city? How is the idea of rootedness addressed in the novel?
6. Uncas and Alex become confidants and friends, even though they are different in many ways. What are some of their differences? How do these differences help or stand in the way of Uncas and Alex communicating with each other?
7. Is Uncas, "Lord Reticent Taciturn," typical of men of his generation?
8. What about Margaret? Is she typical of women of her generation? Why or why not?
9. In the final moment of the book Uncas says that he wishes he had asked his wife to dance. What does this moment mean?
10. Does the book have a happy or a sad ending? What does it leave us feeling about the future of the characters?

Contact the author, Betsey Osborne, at uncas@betseyosborne.com

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