

# READING GROUP GUIDE

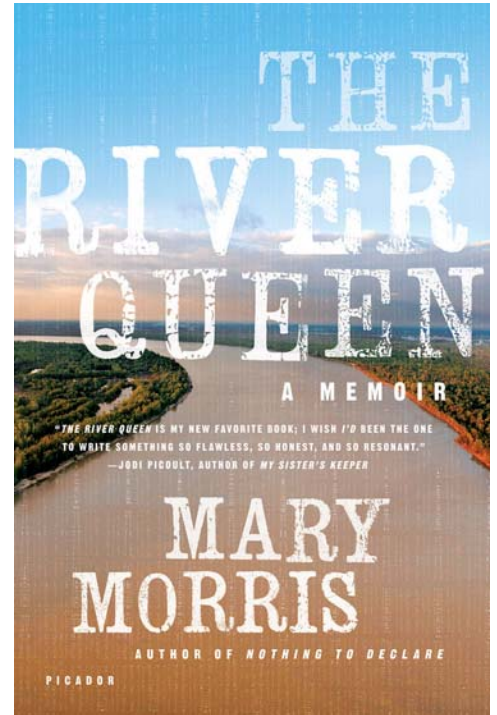
## *The River Queen*

*A Novel*

*by Mary Morris*

ISBN-13: 978-0-312-42789-4

ISBN-10: 0-312-42789-1



### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The River Queen* 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 River Queen*.

### About the Book

In the fall of 2005 acclaimed writer Mary Morris set off down the Mississippi River in a battered old houseboat called *The River Queen*, with two river rats named Tom and Jerry and an ailing, irascible rat terrier named Samantha Jean. Her father had just died. Her daughter had gone off to college. Lost and uncertain, Morris returned to the river of her youth, to the waterside towns where her father had once lived. In this poignant and often humorous memoir, Morris reclaims the world of her childhood as she gets a bearing on her future. She describes traveling down stream through the Midwest, living like a pirate as she survives a tornado and infestation of mayflies, bivouacs on beaches, and ties up to paddleboats in the dark of night. As she learns to pilot the *River Queen* through these fabled waters, Morris delivers a memoir that “deserves to be both a best-seller and a classic” (The Courier-Journal).

## Praise for *The River Queen*

"The River Queen is my new favorite book; I wish *I'd* been the one to write something so flawless, so honest, and so resonant."—Jodi Picoult, author of *My Sister's Keeper*

"A journey or quest is one of the oldest literary forms, and *The River Queen* is a perfect example of why this genre is so satisfying. . . . Morris's trip--and her tale--are something that everyone could envy."—*Los Angeles Times*

"Fascinating . . . This bittersweet travel tale is told in the very real voice of a smart, sad, gutsy, and absolutely appealing woman whose odyssey transformed her life in ways she never imagined."—*The Tucson Citizen*

"Morris is a delightfully curious traveler. . . . She has an excellent capacity to be at once acerbic and impressed, and readers settle into Morris's story as if she is an old friend."—*Booklist*

## About the Author

**Mary Morris** is the author of the travel memoirs *Nothing to Declare*, *Wall to Wall*, and *Angels and Aliens*, along with six novels and three collections of short stories. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and daughter.

## Discussion Questions

1. The author has published novels, short stories, and other travel memoirs such as this one. She has said that no matter what genre she writes in, she is always telling a story. What is the story here and why is Morris telling it?
2. The book contains many references to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. Do you think that the author intended to write a modern day Huckleberry Finn? What are the similarities in theme and subject matter between the two books?
3. The memoir has an interesting structure, moving back and forth in time. How does the author accomplish this? Is it effective? Does it remind you of a river?
4. Music plays an important role in this book. How would you describe its role in the book and also in terms of Morris' relationship to her father?
5. Morris wants to discover her father and the secret life he led. Why is the discovery of the photograph in Hannibal so important to her?
6. How does the author use the comedy of life on the boat with Tom and Jerry to offset the sadness over the loss of her father?
7. How would you characterize the author's relationship with her father? Do you think he was a good parent to her?

8. How does the author incorporate the history of the river into the present-day story? Which did you find more compelling?

9. Does this journey make you think Morris is brave or foolhardy? And does it make you think of journeys you would like to take?

10. At one point Morris refers to the river as a "ghost river." In this post 9/11, post-Katrina world, do you feel as if she is trying to impart a social or political message? Later in the book Jerry refers to the river as the last free place in America. What do you think he means?

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