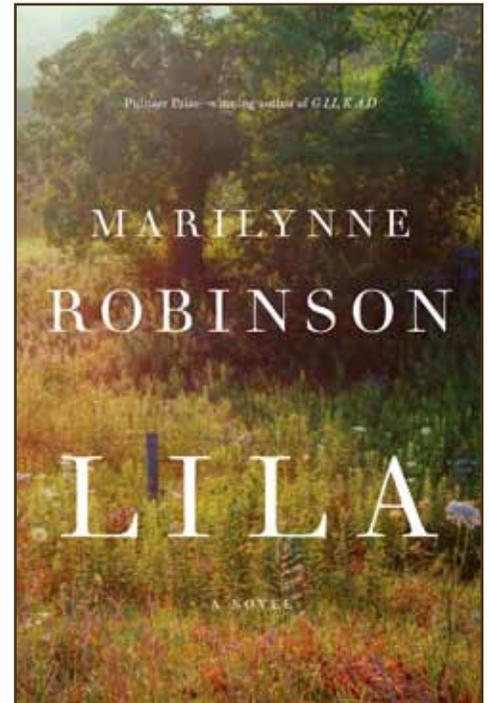


Reading Group Gold

Lila

A novel

by Marilynne Robinson



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Returning to the beloved fictional town that has inspired millions of readers worldwide, Marilynne Robinson now turns her eye to a homeless girl raised far from the comfortable lives of the characters in *Gilead* and *Home*. In *Lila*, we explore a hardscrabble world of shrewd drifters who emphasize self-sufficiency, not self-sacrifice. When Lila seeks shelter from the rain in a country church, she unwittingly sets herself on an entirely new path, capturing the heart of the venerable Reverend John Ames and eventually becoming his wife. As Lila struggles to reconcile her former days of hardship and danger with Ames's gentle Christian worldview, she embarks on a profound journey of faith, doubt, and the mysteries of survival.

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion of *Lila*. We hope that the following questions will enhance your reading group's experience of this deeply moving novel.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The novel's opening paragraphs vividly capture the deprivations experienced by young Lila. How do these experiences affect her immersion in the culture of Gilead? As she reaches adulthood, what does Lila believe about the nature of life?
2. How did your perception of Doll shift throughout the novel? What motivates her to rescue Lila? What do the two girls teach each other about loyalty and its limitations?

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3. Lila recalls the day she ventured into John Ames's candlelit church (echoing Ames's tender recollection of that scene, which was presented in *Gilead*). Doane had told Lila, "Churches just want your money," yet she needed refuge. What does Ames's church want from Lila?
4. As she copies difficult passages from the Bible, Lila continually returns to questions about human suffering and misfortune. What is your response to this debate? How does Lila's practical wisdom compare to the philosophical wisdom of Ames and Boughton?
5. What is the significance of Doll's knife—both literally (as a weapon) and as a metaphor? Can someone from Ames's world of gentleness have the capacity to understand what the knife means to Lila?
6. What lies at the heart of Lila and Ames's decision to marry? What needs and longings do they share? How does their relationship reflect the broader needs and longings of humanity?
7. Which of the novel's Bible quotations resonated most strongly with you? How were you taught to approach a sacred text?
8. Does the age difference between Lila and Ames create an imbalance in their marriage?
9. How is Lila's sense of self affected by her days in St. Louis? Was she wounded or empowered by that chapter of her life?
10. While *Gilead* and *Home* emphasize the relationships between fathers and their children (particularly their sons), *Lila* accentuates the perspective of women. How does this affect the storyline and the imagery?
11. What beliefs does Doll instill in Lila about nurturing a child?
12. Discuss the time and place depicted in *Lila*. What were your family's circumstances during the mid-twentieth century? Is contemporary America less connected to the natural world and to the contemplative aspects of life? What insight can an urban reader in the Information Age gain from Lila and Ames?
13. Discuss the concept of trust as it plays out in *Lila*. What are the characters' greatest barriers to trust? What does it take to quell such fear? Is it as simple as sharing all that we know—especially our most vulnerable moments? In the novel, how is trust distinguished from faith?
14. How does Lila reconcile her husband's religious views with her life before she arrived in Gilead? Does she undergo a conversion in Gilead or does she arrive at something else entirely?
15. What do the closing lines of *Lila* tell us about life, and the absence of life?

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

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PRAISE FOR *LILA*

“A masterpiece . . . Robinson carefully crafts this provocative and deeply meaningful spiritual search for the meaning of existence.” —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marilynne Robinson is the author of the novels *Home*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award and won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; *Gilead*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *Housekeeping*, which won the PEN/Hemingway Award for best first novel. She is also the author of three nonfiction books: *When I Was a Child I Read Books*, *Mother Country*, and *The Death of Adam*. Robinson teaches at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop in Iowa City.

Guide written by Amy Clements