



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

The Glass House

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *The Glass House*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *The Glass House*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. From the moment Cicely Pick arrives in Scotland, her dark skin makes her conspicuous. As Antonia points out, “This is what they would talk about in the days ahead; the color of George Pick’s wife’s skin.” How does Cicely navigate a society that has most likely never interacted with someone who looks like her? In what ways does she own who she is, despite the racism she faces?
2. Discuss the importance of class in this novel. Cicely reflects, “In India, however, she would never have entered a servant’s quarters. The caste system did not allow it... She was pretty sure in Scotland women of a certain class didn’t drink tea with their gardeners. But what did she care about class?” How is the concept of class redefined in this novel, when the characters come from such different societies? In what ways does Cicely disrupt the status quo because of her background and the color of her skin?
3. Antonia believes she “knows how she appeared to the world... She was cosseted, sheltered, as fragile and ridiculous as a fig tree wrapped up in muslin in winter to guard it from frost.” To what extent do you believe she is correct about others’ perceptions of her? How does Antonia counteract or challenge this narrative as the novel progresses?
4. Cicely and Antonia could not be more different. Where Cicely is worldly and cultured, Antonia is sheltered and isolated. They clash from the beginning and have difficulty trusting each other. How, therefore, does affection blossom between these two very different women? Would you describe their relationship as a friendship?
5. What challenges do both Cicely and Antonia face in light of the decisions made by the men in their lives? Can you see similarities between their predicaments?
6. The novel opens with Edward Pick’s funeral, yet he remains a strong presence at Balmarra, his portraits covering the walls and his will driving the novel’s plot. How does he shape George’s and Antonia’s characters (and their relationship to each other), and continue to exert influence over their lives? What about Malcolm? What pressures does he face running Balmarra in the absence of the Pick men?

7. Though we never actually meet George Pick in the present narrative, we learn quite a lot about him through his letters, as well as the memories and meditations of Cicely and Antonia. What type of person was George Pick, specifically as a brother and a husband?
8. When we first meet Kitty, she has just been ripped away from everything familiar to her, especially her Ayah. But as she spends more time at Balmarra, Kitty grows to love it. Why does she change her mind about the estate? Are there specific moments in the novel that demonstrate her evolution?
9. Antonia isn't able to have children herself, and when Cicely and Kitty first arrive, Antonia doesn't quite know what to feel about her niece. "Over the weeks, however, she had become accustomed to listening out for her voice and the funny little songs she sang. They had grown close." While Cicely is sick with malaria, the two establish a special bond. What do you think the future holds for their relationship?
10. From their first meeting, Cicely and Lorimer are pulled toward each other, although they never act on their desire. What do you make of their relationship? Are they simply "attracted to the thrill of the illicit," as Cicely reflects at one point, or are there genuine feelings between them? Do you think they will end up together?
11. Antonia never forgot about Henry, and when they finally consummate their love, she feels that "they seemed to fit, his mouth on hers, her shoulder in the crook of his arm." But in the end, Antonia does not follow Henry to Paris. Why does she refuse his offer?
12. Instead of Paris, Antonia chooses to go to India, and when Malcolm begs to come with her, she accepts him. How do you understand their reconciliation, as they find each other "in a way that they hadn't ever before"? Do you think Antonia is right to forgive him and decide to work on their marriage?
13. What is the role of art in Antonia's life? How do her secret sketchbooks represent both freedom and the lack thereof? Were you surprised that Antonia chose to follow in her brother's path of adventure rather than pursue a career in art?
14. Throughout the novel, we see Antonia, Malcolm, George, Cicely, and Kitty keep secrets from one another, the biggest one being Cicely's true purpose for having traveled all the way to Scotland. All these secrets have painful consequences when they come to light, but are the characters better off knowing the truth? What remains secret in the end? What would you have revealed, and what would you have kept quiet?
15. What does the glass house at Balmarra symbolize in this novel? What do you make of Antonia's decision, near the end, to destroy it?