

The Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls Reading Group Questions

1. The author moves between the ordered, class-conscious world of Yonahlossee and the dreamlike plantation of Thea's Florida childhood. How do these two landscapes differ physically? What about socially? Is the geography of the place linked to its larger differences? How is Thea herself altered by these differences when she moves from one to the other?
2. Think about the relationship between Thea and Sam. In what ways are they more than siblings? How does their relationship change as they grow up? Would their relationship and its evolution have been different if they were not twins?
3. Thea grows up in a world where her only peers are boys. How does exposure to the world of girls change her? What does she learn from forming relationships with other girls? How do her specific relationships with Sissy and Leona differ? In what ways is Thea a friend to both girls? In what ways does she betray them?
4. Think about the men in Thea's life. What is she looking for in these relationships? What does she find? How is Thea's first romantic relationship different from her second one? Does she see the differences? How are they important to the growth of her character and to the shape of her story? By the end of the book, how has she been changed by these relationships?
5. Horses are deeply important to Thea. It could even be said that she is a different person when she is riding. Why do you think horses change her? What does she learn about herself through riding?
6. Bravery is a theme throughout the book. What does it mean to be brave? Are there times when bravery can be dangerous? How does her bravery help or hurt Thea?
7. Thea's desires are often at odds with what is expected of her. What does Thea desire? How are her desires channeled? Are there any better alternatives?
8. Why do you think the author chose to set her novel during the Depression? In what ways does the Depression figure into the book or affect the characters? Do you think of it served more as historical background or did its constant presence change the way you interpreted the story?
9. Think about the differences between Thea and Sam's family and Georgie's family. How do these differences affect the twins' relationship with their cousin and their parents' relationship with his parents? Does any of this influence Georgie's behavior toward Thea or hers toward him? How does it affect the adults' responses to what happens later?
10. How much are Thea's parents responsible for what happens to Thea? How much are they responsible for the nature of her relationship with Sam when they were children and then later as teens and adults? What do you think they could or should have done differently?