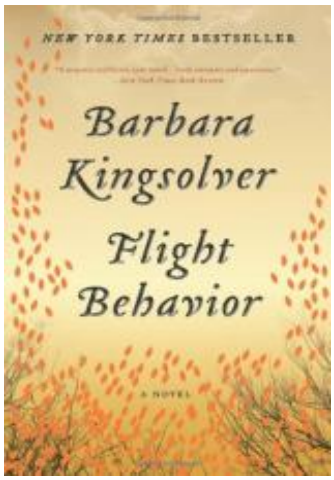
Flight Behavior

by Barbara Kingsolver



About the Book

Set in the present year in the rural community of Feathertown, Tennessee, **Flight Behavior** tells the story of Dellarobia Turnbow, a petite, razor-sharp 29-year old who nurtured worldly ambitions before becoming pregnant and marrying at seventeen. Now, after more than a decade of tending small children on a failing farm, oppressed by poverty, isolation, and her husband?s antagonistic family, she has mitigated her boredom by surrendering to an obsessive flirtation with a handsome younger man. In the opening scene she is headed for a secluded mountain cabin to meet this man and initiate what she expects will be a self-destructive affair.

The tryst never happens. Instead she walks into something on the mountainside she cannot explain or understand: a forested valley filled with silent red fire that appears to Dellarobia to be a miracle. Her discovery is both beautiful and terrible, and elicits explanation of every type: religious fundamentalists claim it as a manifestation of God; climate scientists scrutinize it as an element of disaster; politicians and environmentalists declaim its lessons; charlatans mine its opportunity; international media construct and deconstruct the story; and townspeople cope with bizarre alterations of custom.

After years lived entirely in the confines of one small house, Dellarobia finds her path suddenly opening out, chapter by chapter, into blunt and confrontational engagement with her family, her church, her town, her continent, and finally the world at large. Over the course of a single winter her life will become the property of the planet and also, possibly for the first time, securely her own.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the significance of the novel?s title? Talk about the imagery of flight. How is it represented throughout the story?

2. How do the chapter titles relate both to scientific concepts as well as the events that unfold within each chapter itself?

3. Describe Dellarobia. How is she of this mountain town in Tennessee and how is she different from it? How are she and her family connected to the land and to nature itself? How are they disconnected? How does this shape their viewpoints? How does she describe herself? Do you agree with her self-assessment?

4. Talk about the characters names?Dellarobia, Preston, Cordelia, Dovey, Ovid Byron, Cub, Bear, Hester. How does the author?s choice of nomenclature suit her characters? When you first meet these characters, including Pastor Bobby, what were your first impressions? Were your notions about them challenged as the story progressed?

5. Describe the small town in Tennessee where Dellarobia lives. What are the people like? Are they familiar to you? What is everyday life like for them? What are their major joys and concerns? How you strike a balance between protecting nature when your livelihood depends upon its destruction?

6. Talk about Della?s relationships with the various people in her life: Cub, Hester, Pastor Bobby, Dovey, Ovid Byron. What do her experiences teach her about herself and life?

7. How does Della react when she first sees the Monarchs? What greater meaning do the butterflies hold for her? How is she like the butterflies? How does finding them transform her life? Were the butterflies a miracle?

8. As news of her discovery spreads, what are the reactions of her in-laws and her neighbors? How do they view Della? What are their impressions of the scientists and tourists who descend upon their remote town?

9. What does Dellarobia think about her new friends, and especially Ovid Byron? What about the scientists?how do they view people like Della, her family, and her neighbors? Does either side see they other realistically?

10. Cub and his father, Bear, want to sell the patch of forest where the Monarchs are to a lumber company for clear-cutting. What ramifications would this have, not only for the butterflies but for Della?s family and her town? Why is it often difficult for people see the long-term effects of their immediate actions? Cub doesn?t consider conserving nature to be his problem. What might you say to convince him otherwise?

11. Though she may not have a formal education beside her high school diploma, would you call Dellarobia wise? Where does her knowledge come from? Is she religious? Their Christian faith is very important to many of her neighbors. How does Barbara Kingsolver portray religion, faith, and God in the novel? What are your impressions of Pastor Bobby?

12. ?Kids in Feathertown wouldn?t know college-bound from a hole in the ground. They don?t need it for life around here. College is kind of irrelevant.,? Della tells Ovid. Why isn?t college important to these people? Should it be? Would you say the people of Feathertown respect education? Why is faith and instinct enough for some people? When she explained this to Ovid, ?His eyes went wide, as if she?d mentioned they boiled local children alive. His shock gave her a strange satisfaction she could not have explained. Insider status, maybe.? Explain her attitude. Yet Dellarobia also believes that, ?educated people had powers.? What does she mean by this? How does education empower people? Can it also blind them?

13. After Dellarobia?s parents died, what options did she have? She wanted to go to school?and did try?she tells Ovid. ?People who hadn?t been through it would think it was that simple: just get back on the bus, ride to the next stop. He would have no inkling of the great slog of effort that tied up people like her in the day to day. Or the quaking misgivings that infected every step forward, after a loss. Even now, dread still struck her down sometimes if she found herself counting on things being fine. Meaning her now-living children and their future, those things. She had so much more to lose now than just herself or her own plans.? What are the factors that hold back people in Dellarobia?s circumstances? How can they be overcome? How is each character?s ideas about the future colored by his or her circumstances?

14. Flight Behavior illuminates the conflicting attitudes of different classes towards nature and the idea of climate change. How does each side see this issue? Where do they find common ground? Do you believe in global warming or climate change? Explain the basis of your beliefs. How much do you know about both the proponents and opponents in this debate?

15. Why do so many Americans fear or dislike science? Why do so many others fear or dislike religion? What impact do these attitudes have on the nation now and what do they portend for our future?

16. For Dellarobia, ?Nobody truly decided for themselves, there was too much information. What they actually did was scope around, decide who was looking out for their clan, and sign on for the memos on a wide array of topics.? Do you agree that this is a fair assessment of a divided America? How can we get beyond our judgments and stereotypes?

17. How is media both a help and a hindrance in our understanding of social issues? How does it offer clarity and how does it add confusion? How is the media portrayed in **Flight Behavior**? What impact does it have on Dellarobia and the fate of the butterflies? People are envious that the media pays attention to Dellarobia, yet she says being interviewed was like, ?having her skin peeled off.? Why are so many people consumed by a desire for fame?

18. Ovid has doubts about his work. ?What was the use of saving a world that had no soul left in it. Continents without butterflies, seas without coral reefs, he meant. What if all human effort amounted basically to saving a place for ourselves to park?? he asks Dellarobia? How would you answer him?

19. Flight Behavior interweaves important themes: religion and science, poverty and wealth, education and instinct or faith, intolerance and acceptance, How are these themes used to complement each other and how do they conflict? Choose one theme and trace it throughout the novel, explaining how it illuminates a particular character?s life.

20. At the end of the novel, Dellarobia recalls when Ovid Byron first met Preston and declared the boy a scientist. ?A moment, Dellarobia now believed, that changed Preston?s life. You never knew which split second might be the zigzag bolt dividing all that went before from everything that comes next.? Have you ever had such a defining moment in your life? Was there a special person who influenced you and helped guide or shift the course of your life?

21. What do you think will happen to Dellarobia, Preston, and Cordelia?

22. What did you take away from reading **Flight Behavior**?

Author Bio

Barbara Kingsolver is the author of 10 bestselling works of fiction, including the novels UNSHELTERED, THE BEAN TREES and THE POISONWOOD BIBLE, as well as books of poetry, essays, creative nonfiction, and COYOTE'S WILD HOME, a children?s book co-authored with Lily Kingsolver. She also collaborated with family members on the influential ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MIRACLE: A Year of Food Life.

Kingsolver?s work has been translated into more than 30 languages and has earned a devoted readership at home and abroad. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and has received numerous awards and honors including the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel, DEMON COPPERHEAD, the National Humanities Medal, and, most recently, the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. She lives with her husband on a farm in southern Appalachia.

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Publication Date: June 4, 2013
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 464 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 0062124277
ISBN-13: 9780062124272