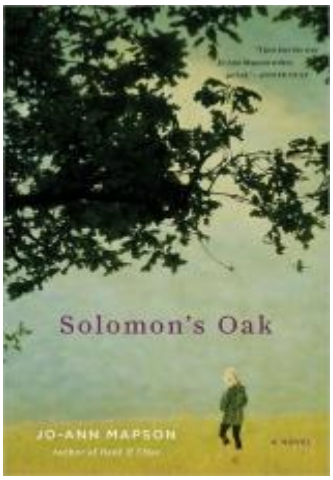
Solomon's Oak

by Jo-Ann Mapson



About the Book

Glory Solomon never expected to be a young widow, a wedding planner, or a business owner, but suddenly she is all three. After her husband?s unexpected death, Glory turns his hand-built chapel into a wedding venue. Unconventional couples are drawn to the modest chapel, which is shaded under a historic tree known as Solomon?s Oak. Glory?s first clients request a pirate wedding, complete with sword-fighting and gallons of grog. In the chaos of the pirate ceremony, Glory meets two people who will change her life forever: Juniper and Joseph.

Juniper is a 14-year-old homeless girl looking for a safe place to stay. With a face full of piercings and an attitude to match, Juniper is still haunted by the disappearance of her older sister four years ago. As Glory struggles to raise Juniper as a foster daughter, she realizes she can?t get by without Joseph Vigil, a former cop who halts the pirate wedding when he mistakes the sword-fighting for real violence. Joseph has demons of his own, and he expresses his grief through nature photography. His favorite subject is Glory?s tree, Solomon?s Oak. As Glory and Joseph bond over their desire to help Juniper, Glory comes to realize that although mourning never quite ends, the love of a ragtag family might be the solace she needs.

Discussion Guide

1. Solomon?s Oak opens with the story of Alice Halloran, the woman who lost her child and her life in 1898. How does the legend of Alice?s ghost set the scene for the novel to come? How does Alice?s tragedy relate to the losses that Glory, Juniper, and Joseph have also endured?

2. Solomon?s Oak Wedding Chapel specializes in untraditional ceremonies. Why is Glory open to hosting all kinds of weddings? How does the pirate wedding at the beginning of the novel spark other unconventional relationships for Glory?

3. Glory?s specialty is ?last-chance dogs? --- training and nurturing abandoned pets. What strategies does Glory use to rehabilitate these last-chance dogs? Which of her dogs shows the most progress over the course of the novel? Why is Glory drawn to last-chance dogs --- and to last-chance kids, like Juniper and other foster children?

4. Discuss what ?closet time? means to Glory. Why does she go to the closet when grief overwhelms her? How does Juniper react to Glory?s ?closet time??

5. Discuss the first impression that Juniper makes on Glory. What ?sharp edges? does Glory sense in Juniper when they first meet (49)? How does Juniper eventually change those first impressions? How does Juniper surprise Glory, and how does she disappoint her? What characteristics does Joseph glimpse in Juniper that Glory cannot see?

6. Consider the complicated relationship Glory has with her sister Halle. Why is there so much conflict between the sisters? How does Glory misjudge Halle? How does Halle express her jealousy of Glory? How does Halle make up for so many years of conflict at the end of **Solomon?s Oak**?

7. The ?gospel according to Caroline,? says the social worker who brings Glory and Juniper together, is ?a pair of unhappy people working together toward whatever kind of life there is after so much sorrow? (85). How do Glory and Juniper eventually build a shared life upon their separate sorrows? Why did Dan secretly make Caroline promise to find Glory the perfect foster child? How is Juniper a perfect match for Glory?

8. Two people live on in Joseph?s memories: his grandmother Penny, and his friend from the police force, Rico. How does Joseph balance these two sets of memories: his happy childhood discoveries with his grandmother, and his flashbacks to the shooting that killed Rico? How does Joseph grieve for Penny and for Rico, and how does he honor their memories?

9. What does Solomon?s Oak mean to Glory, Joseph, and Juniper? What artistic, financial, and symbolic possibilities does the oak tree offer each of them? How does the tree inspire each person who comes to see it? Why is the oak so difficult to capture artistically, whether on canvas or on film?

10. Discuss the unique bond between Juniper and Joseph. How does Joseph gradually help Juniper find confidence in men? How does education bring this unlikely pair closer? How does Joseph help Juniper see the world differently?

11. As Joseph talks to Glory at Lorna?s Christmas party, ?It occurred to him that after separating himself from his own family, here was the person he wanted to tell his story to, but the place was too crowded, and besides, it was Christmas? (216). What is it about Glory that attracts Joseph and makes him want to tell her about his past? How is the Christmas party a turning point for Joseph and Glory?s budding relationship?

12. For Glory, ?Her kitchen was her compass, her true north? (362). How does Glory find comfort in the kitchen? How does cooking bring Glory closer to both Juniper and Joseph?

13. Joseph tells Glory, ?Sometimes you meet people and you just know you?ve crossed paths for a reason? (255). How does fate bring Joseph, Glory, and Juniper together? Why does their crossing of paths feel like destiny to Joseph and Juniper? Why does Glory have trouble believing in fate?

14. Discuss the meaning of family in **Solomon?s Oak**. Which biological families fall apart in the novel? What nonbiological bonds are forged, and how? How do the characters of **Solomon?s Oak** manage to redefine what family, marriage, and child-rearing mean?

15. Solomon?s Oak takes place in 2003 and 2004. Why might Mapson have chosen to set the novel in these years, rather than in the present day? What connections does Juniper, now an anthropology student, draw between the big events of 2004 --- earthquakes, extinctions, and bone discoveries --- and her personal experiences of that year?

16. In an essay on photography, Juniper writes, ?It?s about accepting that the picture you end up with will never be the picture you were trying to take? (286). How does this lesson of photography apply to life? What unexpected situations have Juniper, Glory, and Joseph found themselves in by the end of the novel, and how have they come to accept their new lives?

17. Spotting Juniper reading a novel, Glory thinks, ?there was hope for any kid that read fiction. A willingness to lose one?s self in a story was the first step to learning compassion, to appreciating other cultures, to realizing what possibilities the world held for people who kept at life despite the odds? (76). What can a reader learn from **Solomon?s Oak**? What possibilities of compassion, cultural appreciation, and personal endurance can be found within this novel?

Author Bio

Jo-Ann Mapson is the author of five previous novels, including the
bestselling THE WILDER SISTERS and BLUE RODEO, which
was made into a CBS-TV movie starring Kris Kristofferson and
Ann-Margret. She lives in south-central Alaska. BAD GIRL is an alternate selection of the Literary Guild, Doubleday Book Club, and Book-of-the-Month Club. OWEN'S DAUGHTER, her latest novel, will be released in July.

Solomon's Oak
by Jo-Ann Mapson

Publication Date: October 11, 2011
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Bloomsbury USA
ISBN-10: 1608194078
ISBN-13: 9781608194070