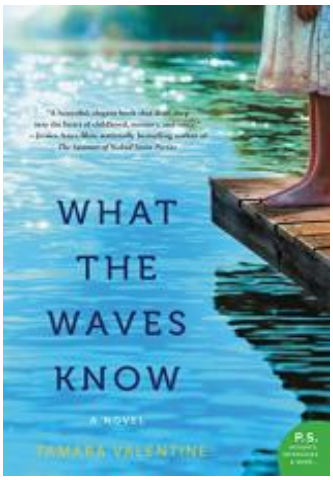
What the Waves Know

by Tamara Valentine



About the Book

The tiny state of Rhode Island is home to even tinier Tillings Island --- which witnessed the biggest event of Izabella Rae Haywood's life. For it was there, on Iz's sixth birthday, that her father left...and took her voice with him.

Eight years later in the summer of 1974, Iz?s mother is through with social workers, psychiatrists and her daughter's silence. In one last attempt to return Iz?s voice, the motley pair board the ferry to Tillings in hopes that the journey will help Izabella heal herself by piecing together splintered memories of the day her words fled.

But heartbreak is a difficult puzzle to solve, and everyone in Tillings seems to know something Iz does not. Worse, each has an opinion about Izabella's dreamer of a father, the undercurrents of whose actions have spun so many lives off course.

Now, as the island's annual *Yemayá* festival prepares to celebrate the ties that bind mothers to children, lovers to each other, and humankind to the sea, Izabella must unravel the tangled threads of her own history and reclaim a voice gone silent?or risk losing herself --- and any chance she may have for a future --- to the past.

Discussion Guide

1. WHAT THE WAVES KNOW is told from the first-person point of view of Izabella, who hasn?t spoken in eight years. The concept of stories and secrets rests at the heart of this piece. How does Izabella become the keeper of both through her silence?

2. How does the title WHAT THE WAVES KNOW represent these elements of the work?

3. In what ways do religion and mythology make sense of the world for Izabella? What myths, specifically, does she

embrace? Are there similarities between them even though they are drawn from different cultures?

4. Do you think it is true that Izabella cannot speak initially, or is she choosing her own silence?

5. Izabella not only accompanies her father on his adventures, she follows him into the stories that slowly take over reality for him. Is there a point when she makes a conscious decision to stop? If so, when?

6. The characters all represent different interpretations of what defines mental illness, as well as dramatically different responses to trauma and loss. How do they each reframe their lives in the face of devastation? How does each hold on to the past and let go of it?

7. The title plays not only on the theme of mental illness, but a person?s culpability, or lack of it, in the face of mental illness. In what passages do we see this?

8. Throughout the story, Izabella both wants to hear the Nikommo and is afraid of them. Why? How do they speak to the issues with her father? Why might it be important that they are tied to her father?s heredity? Is this potentially defining to Izabella?

9. Izabella is afraid that she is insane. Why? What does this reveal about her actual breadth of understanding about what happened with her father?

10. One of the elements of the story is that the past and present continuously weave and bob around one another. Why has the author created a storyline in which you are constantly being pulled from one point in time to another?

11. Not only is the reader being torn between the past and present, she is also being thrust in and out of stories and mythologies. Why? Is there a clear truth behind the fiction?

12. While in many ways Zorrie?s character is struggling to get Izabella to fall into societal norms, Remy?s character is intent on ignoring societal rules and norms. How are the two characters different? What role does Remy play in healing both Izabella and Zorrie?

13. Why does Remy become so entwined in Zorrie and Izabella?s life? How do the different members of the O?Malley family respond to Zorrie and Izabella returning to Tillings Island? How do the vastly different reactions represent the human experience of loss and grief?

14. Both of Izabella?s parents impart aspects of their philosophies about life to her, and both visions of the world become equally important in her recovery. What does each parent give Izabella and how does it become integral to her survival?

15. Competing images of light and darkness are used symbolically throughout the story. What do they represent in the struggle for Izabella to reclaim and make sense of what has happened? One of the issues central to her struggle is weighing what is real against what is fiction, from religion to perception. How does she resolve this?

16. Izabella says she first came to know what it meant to be God standing in the waters of Potter?s Creek. What do you

think she means by this and how does it become a critical framework for the story?

17. Although the impetus of the story revolves around Ansel Haywood?s disappearance, the author has included repeating images and references to the Divine Feminine in Yemaya, the moon, the Virgin Mary and Venus. Why does this become inherently important to the story?

18. In ancient times, the moon was the sign of the ?Triple Goddess,? representing maiden, mother and crone. How is this interpretation realized in the text?

19. The salmon in Potter?s Creek becomes an important symbol for Izabella?s story. How does it foreshadow what is to come in the story?

20. In many ways, each of the characters has a separate understanding and interpretation of the past. How does this speak to the idea of stories defining our realities?

21. Does Izabella become the healed or the healer in the story?

22. Why might the author have chosen a stone to represent the process of carrying secrets? How does this come to represent both the interconnectivity and independence of our own existence and reality?

Author Bio

Tamara Valentine obtained an M.A. with distinction from Middlebury College and has spent the past 14 years as a professor in the English Department at Johnson & Wales University. Presently, she lives in Kingston, Rhode Island, with her husband and three children.

Critical Praise

?A novel rich in mythology and childhood secrets.... This dreamy coming-of-age mystery unfolds in tantalizing waves with keen insight and lush prose.?

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