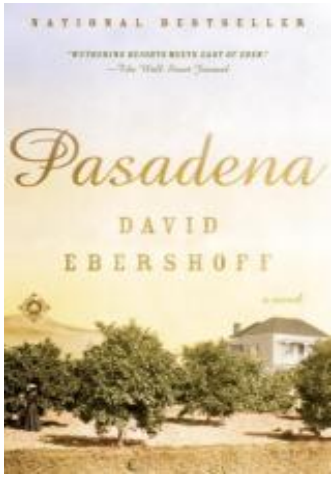
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Pasadena: A Novel

by David Ebershoff



About the Book

From the award-winning author of **The Danish Girl** and **The Rose City**, **Pasadena** tells the story of Linda Stamp, a fishergirl born in 1903 on a coastal onion farm, and the three men who change her life: her jealous brother, Edmund; Bruder, the orphan Linda's father brings home from World War I; and a Pasadena orange rancher named Willis Poore. The novel spans Linda's adventurous and romantic life, weaving the tales of her Mexican mother and her German-born father with those of the rural Pacific Coast of her youth and of the small, affluent city, Pasadena, that becomes her home. **Pasadena** is a novel of passion and history, about a woman and a place in perpetual transformation.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel has two narratives, that of Cherry and Blackwood and the larger story of Linda and Bruder. What effect does this have on how the story is told? How does the author use this narrative strategy to reveal information about his characters and their fates?

2. Many critics have suggested that place?California?is as much a character in **Pasadena** as the people in the story. Do you agree with this? In one interview David Ebershoff commented, "I wanted my characters' internal landscapes to echo or contradict the external landscapes of California." How does the changing landscape of Southern California reflect the characters and their lives?

3. Linda is a character in perpetual transformation: she is born Sieglinde, has her name changed to Linda, and takes on the name Lindy after she marries. Why is she always seeking change? How does this affect her ability to know herself? Who else in the novel reinvents himself or herself? Why do you think so many characters in **Pasadena** have abandoned their pasts? Is this common to the American experience? To that of California?

4. Why do you think Linda and Bruder have difficulty loving each other? What is it about their characters and the

circumstances of their relationship that thwarts their affection? Bruder is described as resigned to fate, Linda as convinced of her own free will. How does this affect the outcome of their romance, and their lives?

5. Consider the relationship between Linda and Valencia. How are they different, how similar? Do you think that Linda's relationship with her mother is more important to her than her relationshipe with her father? Why (or why not)? What do you think in Valencia's childhood in Mexico impresses Linda the most? What about in Dieter's experience in Germany and as an immigrant?

6. Linda and Charlotte Moss begin life in similar circumstances. Why do you think their lives diverge so drastically? Who do you think compromises the most? Why?

7. What do you make of the world of **Pasadena** and the Poores? Are you surprised that it attracts Linda? What do you think spellbinds her the most? Why do you think she makes the choices she does?

8. In his World War I adventures in France, Bruder spares a man's life. Are his actions heroic or selfish? Why do you think he insists on keeping his secrets? Whom do you think he is keeping them from?

9. Throughout the novel the author uses epigraphs from the poetry of Emily Brontë. Why do you think the author quotes Brontë? The Wall Street Journal described the novel as "East of Eden meets Wuthering Heights." What other novels do you find echoed in **Pasadena**?

10. By the end of the novel many characters are living with the choices they made long ago. What do you think the novel says about regret and redemption? About knowing and accepting the consequences of one's life? How are the fates of Blackwood and Cherry different than those of Bruder and Linda? How are their fates knotted together? What does **Pasadena** say about fate?

Author Bio

David Ebershoff is the author of **The Danish Girl**, a *New York Times* Notable Book and the winner of the Rosenthal Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Lambda Literary Award. His collection of stories, **The Rose City**, was named one of the best books of 2001 by the*Los Angeles Times*. His books have been published in more than a dozen countries to critical acclaim. Since 1998, he has been the publishing director of the Modern Library. He has taught at New York University and Princeton, where he is now a visiting lecturer. Originally from Pasadena, he is a graduate of Brown University and the University of Chicago, and he currently lives in New York City. He can be reached at www.ebershoff.com.

Critical Praise

"A luxurious tragedy . . . gorgeous, full of romance and disaster . . . **Pasadena** is a novel to get lost in."

Pasadena: A Novel

by David Ebershoff

Publication Date: July 8, 2003
Paperback: 520 pages
Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0812968484
ISBN-13: 9780812968484