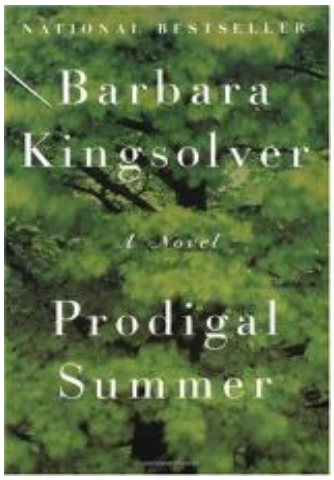
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Prodigal Summer: A Novel

by Barbara Kingsolver



About the Book

Prodigal Summer weaves together three stories of human love within a larger tapestry of lives inhabiting the forested mountains and struggling small farms of southern Appalachia. From her outpost in an isolated mountain cabin, Deanna Wolfe, a reclusive wildlife biologist, watches a den of coyotes that have recently migrated into the region. She is caught off-guard by a young hunter who invades her most private spaces and confounds her self-assured, solitary life. On a farm several miles down the mountain, Lusa Maluf Landowski, a bookish city girl turned farmer's wife, finds herself unexpectedly marooned in a strange place where she must declare or lose her attachment to the land that has become her own. And a few more miles down the road, a pair of elderly, feuding neighbors tend their respective farms and wrangle about God, pesticides, and the possibilities of a future neither of them expected.

Over the course of one humid summer, as the urge to procreate overtakes the countryside, these characters find their connections to one another and to the flora and fauna with whom they share a place. With the complexity that characterizes Barbara Kingsolver's finest work, Prodigal Summer embraces pure thematic originality and demonstrates a balance of narrative, drama, and ideas that render it an inspiring work of fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think this book is entitled **Prodigal Summer**? In what ways do all of the characters display "prodigal" characteristics? Who, or what, welcomes them home from their journeys?

2. Deanna is the self-appointed protector of coyotes and all predators. Is she disturbing nature's own ways of dealing with upsets? What about Garnett and his quest for a blight-free chestnut tree-is this "good" for nature?

3. How does the relationship between Deanna and Eddie Bondo change them both? Should Deanna have told Eddie about the pregnancy? Do you think he already knew and that was one of the reasons he left when he did?

4. When Nannie and Garnett hug, a huge barrier between them drops and they both gain a basic understanding of each other's humanness and vulnerability. Do you think a romantic relationship between them will ensue? How much does Garnett's unrecognized longing for love and human contact account for the shift in his perception of Nannie and the greater world around him? What else influences the shift in Garnett? Does Nannie change as well?

5. The three major story lines are named "Predators," "Moth Love," and "Old Chestnuts." Why, besides acknowledging her respect for coyotes, spiders and other predatory creatures, are Deanna's chapters named "Predators?" Does her love of predators make her the "natural" lover of Eddie Bondo? How does Lusa's life mirror the life cycle of her beloved moths? How does her love of insects lead to her emergence from her cocoon of grief (i.e. her relationship to Crystal)? How do Garnett and Nannie remind you of "old chestnuts?" Are they extinct? Are they the few lone trees left alive after a blight?

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.

Critical Praise

"Kingsolver is a gifted magician of words."

Prodigal Summer: A Novel
by Barbara Kingsolver

Publication Date: October 1, 2001
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 464 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 0060959037
ISBN-13: 9780060959036