

The Refuge Discussion Guide

Chapters 1-5

Theme: Challenges

1. In Chapter 2, Frederick and Anna share a dance. How does that dance go from something that brings them together to something that tears them apart? If you have experienced a time when something that was supposed to bring you closer to someone else ended up bringing you further apart, describe how that happened and how it felt.
2. When Anna collects her belongings from the house, she reflects upon the destruction of her marriage. How does losing her relationship with Frederick help her see things with new eyes? Why do lost relationships have a way of doing that?
3. Anna becomes a lawyer because it was a more “practical choice” than being a writer. When people make practical choices over following their dreams, how can that lead to discontentment? Some people believe contentment is about the way we see the world regardless of our circumstances. How do you feel about that?
4. Julia states at the end of Chapter 5, “Dreams can always change...It’s never too late to be the people we always wanted to be.” Why do you think Julia told Anna that? How do you feel about what Julia said?

Chapters 6-10

Theme: Surrender and Let Go

5. How does Anna’s dream about the oak tree help her see that it’s time to make a change?
6. Anna's mother discourages her from leaving. But Anna knows in order to find the answers she seeks she must leave her old life behind. Why does Anna believe that leaving Boston is the only way she can heal?
7. Once Anna begins her road trip, she finally feels "free." Why?
8. At the end of Chapter 10, Anna realizes that faith played a role during her journey to South Carolina. What role has faith played in your life? Describe a time when faith alone helped you through tough times.

Chapters 11-15

Theme: Power of Connection and Reflection

9. Lucita has a strong connection with nature and spirituality. How did that connection influence Anna?
10. Why does Anna view Clark as an "old soul"? How would you describe an “old soul”? Are there examples of “old souls” in your life?

11. Lucita said that “Dragonflies know more about how to truly live in their short lifetimes than many of us will ever learn in ours.” What lessons about life can we learn from the dragonfly?
12. Clark encouraged Anna to learn to love herself. Why is loving ourselves so important? Many people find it difficult to truly love themselves. Why is that such a hard thing to do?

Chapters 16-20

Theme: Exploration and Self-Acceptance

13. When Anna notices the owl and finds a connection with Athena, she believes that there may be something to spirituality. Why is she more open to spirituality now than she was at the beginning of the book? How has her mind opened up to new possibilities?
14. Anna begins meditating and discovers how challenging it can be. What is your experience with meditating? What types of challenges might make meditating difficult for you? Many people believe silencing their minds is an important and valuable way to discover who they truly are. How do you feel about that?
15. How can prayer beads be comforting? If they are a tangible way to keep people close to us, what types of feelings might these beads emit? How can that impact our spiritual connection?
16. When Anna goes within during the circling group, what lessons does she learn? If you take time to go within and be silent, what lessons might you learn about yourself?

Chapters 21-26

Theme: Opening Up and Being Present

17. Lucita and Anna dance in the rain. How can the playfulness of a child help us think about the important things in our lives?
18. Sickness changed Lucita’s family dynamics. Why does sickness do that? How can sickness impact our perspective on the world?
19. What do we learn about Anna from her interaction with Simon in the coffee shop? Describe a time when you made a connection with someone that you hardly knew.
20. Simon says, “The past is a learning experience for us all, and the best thing we can do is try to move on.” Why is that often such a hard thing to do?
21. Anna’s family wants her to return home. What types of pressures can family members place on each other when someone moves far away? Why do parents often want their children to remain close by?

22. Anna is beginning to open up with her new friends and even Simon. How is that possible? What about her has changed?
23. When Anna goes on a date with Simon, she has fun and opens herself up to her feelings. It's as though she's finally able to get out of her own head. But she also wants to continue working on herself. How does listening to her feelings help her do exactly that?

Chapters 27-31

Theme: Self-forgiveness

24. When Esperanza goes to the hospital, Anna struggles with her grief about Claire. She also worries about Lucita and questions whether she's meant to be a mother. But, at the end of the chapter she vows to be there for whatever Lucita needs. What helped Anna see that she could still be there for Lucita despite her own doubts?
25. When Frederick unexpectedly wants to reconcile, memories of Anna's old life come rushing back. What draws her to kiss Frederick and ponder the possibility of returning to her old life?
26. What did you think of Simon's reaction to the kiss? How would you have reacted if you had been in his shoes?
27. What is it about regrets that make us question our current choices? How does guilt and everyone else's expectations influence our decisions?
28. Simon lets Anna go to protect his heart. Why is it often easier to protect our heart instead of allowing ourselves to be vulnerable?
29. Jillian unexpectedly befriends Anna and tells her that perhaps her second chance is about discovering who she is. How did that resonate with Anna?

Chapters 32-36

Theme: Rebirth and Renewal

30. Why do you think Clark was unsure that Anna would stay in South Carolina?
31. There's tension between Anna and Simon at Halloween. How does Simon's apology bring them together? How does openly sharing feelings impact a relationship?
32. How can you tell that writing is something Anna loves to do?
33. Anna struggles with being away from her family during the holidays. Why can the holidays be challenging? What are some challenges you have faced during the holiday season?

34. Clark and Anna share a deep friendship. How is that obvious in their interaction during Christmas? How can friends feel like family?

Chapters 37-40

Theme: Freedom and Self-Expression

35. At Christmas, why is Bernardo unhappy to see Clark and Anna? How does his demeanor change after they give him a gift? Despite Bernardo's tough exterior, how does he feel about Esperanza? How can you tell?
36. When Anna visits Jillian's condo, what do we learn about Jillian? How has her pain impacted her? Describe a time when pain has impacted your life.
37. Lucita has a lot of fun trying on Anna's clothes. What makes Lucita so likeable? What does she help us all remember about life?
38. Simon said he let Anna go before she let him go. Sometimes we miss out on opportunities because we are afraid. How might our lives change if we chose to live from love rather than fear?
39. Clark said, "You can't live life on the sidelines. You have to play with all your heart. It's the only way to truly live." How do you feel about that statement? Why is it sometimes difficult to do?
40. Simon reveals his love for Anna and their relationship goes to the next step. How does Anna know she's ready?

Chapters 41-46

Theme: Acceptance

41. Anna promises to watch over Esperanza's family. Why do you think that would or would not be an easy promise to keep?
42. Bernardo creates a figurine of a dragonfly resting on a lily for Esperanza's funeral. Why is the symbolism of the dragonfly so important at this time in their lives?
43. Time passes and Bernardo resumes his drinking. How is his relationship with Lucita being affected? Why can't he see the negative impact it is having on their life?
44. Lydia said to Anna in her dream that Bernardo has to "experience the pain for himself." Why is that? Why is it not possible for us to learn our life lessons from someone else's pain?

45. There is an argument at Bernardo's birthday dinner. Why does Bernardo struggle with the well-intentioned advice of Clark and Anna? Give an example of when someone's well-intentioned advice created an argument in your life.
46. At the end of the book, why is Simon more open to spirituality? What changed that for him?
47. Why does Lucita running away force Bernardo to see things differently? How can being afraid sometimes help us see the power of love more clearly?
48. Clark said, we "have learned to accept one another wherever we are on our respective journeys. For me, that's the true meaning of family." Why is it sometimes difficult to respect wherever other people are on their journeys?
49. How does Anna's relationship change with her mother during the story? What made that possible?
50. In what ways does your life parallel Anna's? What lessons did she learn that also resonated with you?