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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

North Woods by Daniel Mason

Summary

A sweeping novel about a single house in the woods of New England, told through the lives of those who inhabit it across the centuries—a daring, moving tale of memory and fate from the Pulitzer Prize finalist and author of *The Piano Tuner* and *The Winter Soldier*.

When a pair of young lovers abscond from a Puritan colony, little do they know that their humble cabin in the woods will become home to an extraordinary succession of inhabitants. An English soldier, destined for glory, abandons the battlefields of the New World to devote himself to apples. A pair of spinster twins survive war and famine, only to succumb to envy and desire. A crime reporter unearths a mass grave, but finds the ancient trees refuse to give up their secrets. A lovelorn painter, a conman, a stalking panther, a lusty beetle; as each one confronts the mysteries of the north woods, they come to realize that the dark, raucous, beautiful past is very much alive.

Traversing cycles of history, nature, and even literature, *North Woods* shows the myriad, magical ways in which we're connected to our environment and to one another, across time, language and space. Written along with the seasons and divided into the twelve months of the year, it is an unforgettable novel about secrets and fates that asks the timeless how do we live on, even after we're gone?

Discussion Questions

1. Which era of the yellow house would you most like to visit?
2. Which of its residents (permanent or temporary) would you have liked to spend more time with?
3. Novels often follow the same characters through different settings; *North Woods* follows the same setting through different characters. What was this reading experience like for you?
4. For some characters, the yellow house is a place of refuge and inspiration, for others, an isolated site of captivity. Discuss how the house and its remoteness affected its residents.
5. Daniel Mason employs myriad points of view, writing styles, and genres to tell this story across the centuries. How did these shifting voices affect the narrative?

6. What is the significance of the catamount?
7. The best and worst of human behaviors and experiences are on display in North Woods: love, murder, betrayal, yearning, generosity, madness, envy. What did you make of this?
8. What role do the ghosts play throughout the novel? Does this role change? Discuss.
9. How does Mason bring the local flora and fauna into the novel? What did you make of beetles and spores and seeds sharing the stage with human characters?
10. Who do you imagine the first residents of your home were? Who do you imagine will come after you?

Summary from GoodReads.com
Discussion Questions from Penguin Random House