

Discussion Questions for "Lila"

The following questions can be used to facilitate group discussions on the 2016 All Iowa Reads selection, *Lila* by Marilynne Robinson:

1. The healing power of the sacrament of marriage is an underlying motif in *Lila* -- do you find this a believable or compelling theme?
2. Reverend Ames frequently seems to laugh and/or be flummoxed by Lila's naive interpretations of religion? How does this shape his character or your perception of him?
3. The knife Lila took from Doll serves as a profound artifact to her in many ways - what does it represent, why does it mean so much?
4. Is the Reverend Ames from *Gilead* (if you've read it) the same man as he is in *Lila*, or has he grown? Has his marriage to Lila been positive in his life?
5. Is Lila a strong character or is she weak? Why?
6. Revival movements are juxtaposed to the Reverend Ames's more learned and almost passive approach to faith. What does this say about different ways to approach different kinds of spiritualism?
7. "I'm going to keep you safe," Reverend Ames tells Lila. "And you're going to keep me honest." Explore the relationship between Ames and Lila - what does it bring to each of them?
8. To Lila, the charity of the town of Gilead seems to be infused with judgment from the charitable. Is this a fair interpretation of charity? Or can the value of charity be separated from a position of superiority?
9. Lila comes to develop a relationship with Reverend Ames's previous, deceased family, through tending their graves. Does this speak to their permanence in Ames's life more than hers? Is Lila less important in her mind? Is her child?
10. Many characters in this book, and in the real world, look to their faith and to religious texts to help them navigate the complexities and difficulties of this world. Lila had survived more than her share of grief, and without recourse to faith, prior to meeting Ames. What advantages did this provide her?
11. The Reverend Ames is often unable to explain the problem of evil or to reconcile his and others suffering with his ideas about God. Other characters have nothing positive to say about this world or about the Church. What does this book say to you about the problem of evil? Does it correspond with your own sense of it?
12. Robinson writes "the worrying had worn him out. He gave a sermon once about the disciples sleeping at Gethsemane because they were weary with grief. Sleep is such a mercy, he said. It was a mercy even

then." *Lila* is full of small mercies. What are some others you can think of? What mercies have been granted in your life?