

Discussion Guide

Desire of my Heart

1. One of the themes of *Desire of my Heart* is family. Aside from the smaller family groups of Rachel and Charlie and Melvin and his children, there is also the idea of a “found family.” Which “found family” connections do you relate to the most? Which do you find most endearing?
2. Only after the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1874 did women have the right to open a bank account independently. How different would it have been for Rachel and the children had Melvin not broken with the customs of the 1800s United States by making Rachel and Charlie his partners and putting their names on his accounts in Chapter 9? What would have happened to his family members had he not provided for them after his death?
3. Which residents in the town were the most supportive of their neighbors and travelers? Who would you want as a neighbor?
4. Rachel’s reaction to Melvin’s death in Chapter 15 echoes that of the Israelites in the wilderness.* How did her accusation make you feel when you read it? Did it prompt you to look at the Israelites in a different light? How did Rachel apply the biblical story of the Israelites to her own life? Serafina (Grammie) also referenced the Bible** while mourning Melvin in Chapter 16. How did she choose to react after her hours-long talk with God?
**And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? (Exo 14:11)*
***For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa 55:9)*
5. Charlie is called “the man of the house” three times throughout the novel (by Rachel in Chapter 15, by Grammie in Chapter 17, and by the sheriff in Chapter 18). What did each person mean when giving Charlie that title?
6. Everyone who knows Martha and Sheriff Adkins sees potential for a great relationship. So, what about the two of them prompts others to match-make on their behalf?
7. The children in the novel are not raised with the adage, “Children should be seen and not heard.” This is shown especially with Thomas and his wooden cow Gerta. How does giving a voice to this little boy help add to the story and the development of Thomas’s character? What does it show about the adults in his life?
8. What do you think was the reason for Rachel’s visceral reactions when she first met Pete Manning in Chapter 20? How did the verse Grammie gave Rachel from Psalm 37* in Chapter 21 reinforce the idea that Rachel must wait for the one God has for her?
**Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. (Psa 37:4)*
9. *Desire of my Heart* addresses several mental health issues. Rachel’s depressive episodes are especially poignant. How did people help support those facing mental health challenges on the frontier? How can you help support someone going through a mental health crisis?
10. In Chapter 26, we meet Marshal Clint Shankel. How does the reader (and Grammie) know he’ll be perfect for Rachel? What is revealed to prove that Pete Manning wasn’t the right man for her? How can you speak truth in love like Grammie did?
11. Singing Bird’s community saw her as cursed and judged her nearly worthless, yet she was kind and talented. Do you think another community would have treated her differently? Why was it so easy for the family on the Trexler farm to accept her without question or reservation? Have you ever met someone whose reputation precedes them, only to discover that they are nothing like they had been described?
12. Grammie is a natural spiritual leader. How does she fulfill this role among the many members of her extended “found family”? How do the others follow her example?