



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

Warlight by Michael Ondaatje

1. One of the dilemmas at the heart of Michael Ondaatje's novel is reconciling Rose Williams's bravery, her patriotic heroism, and her treatment of Nathaniel and Rachel. How do readers wrap their heads around this inconsistency? How are we to consider Rose?
2. What is your opinion of Moth and Darter? As Nathaniel, in the opening lines, puts it, "our parents left us in the care of two men who may have been criminals."
3. What is the significance of the title?
4. Consider this passage from the novel, and how it might sum up one of the story's central ideas: "we never know more than the surface of any relationship after a certain stage, just as those layers of chalk, built from the efforts of infinitesimal creatures, work in almost limitless time."
5. Warlight's structure is anything but linear as it shifts back and forth in time and point of view. Is it confusing? How does the structure reflect Nathaniel's own confusion?
6. Nathaniel ponders, "The past never remains the past." Do you agree with his contemplation?
7. When Nathaniel and Rachel discover the reason their mother gave for leaving them was not the true reason, how did her lie make them feel? What lasting repercussions does her untruthfulness leave?
8. What does Nathaniel resolve within himself by the novel's end? What understanding does he reach? Is there a satisfactory resolution at the conclusion?
9. What was the most powerful scene for you in the book?

The above questions were adapted from LitLovers. For supplemental information about this book, in addition to tips and tricks for running a book club, please visit

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