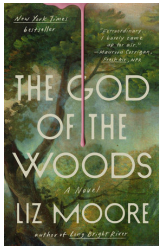




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The God of the Woods Reader's Guide

By **Liz Moore**

Category: **Literary Fiction**

READERS GUIDE

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. *The God of the Woods* combines a layered suspense plot and missing-person investigation with a multi-generational family drama. Which element drew you in and hooked you emotionally: the mystery investigation or the story of family secrets? Were you surprised by the way the different plot elements blended to crescendo together?
2. For much of the book, Liz Moore chases two different mysteries in two different timelines: what happened to Bear Van Laar in 19XX, and what happened to Barbara in 19XX. How are they ultimately connected?
3. Liz Moore explores the beauty and culture of the Adirondack Mountains through several distinct settings: the opulent Van Laar mansion, the surrounding preserve and larger wilderness, the rustic summer camp, and the nearby town of Shattuck. What do each of these settings represent? Through which characters do they intersect? Where are the tensions between these worlds most apparent?
4. The cultural idea of sleep-away summer camp features prominently in the story. Camp Emerson is the place where several characters work and socialize, and where teens learn skills and self-knowledge. It's also the place from which Barbara

disappears. How does the camp function as a kind of in-between place in the story – neither estate nor town, neither luxury nor wilderness, neither upper-class society nor working class – and why is that important?



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5. The wealthy Van Laars rely on residents of a working-class community from the nearby town of Shattuck to service their estate. How do the demographic backgrounds of the different characters influence their lives and outcomes? Consider Alice and Peter Van Laar, T.J. and her father Vic Hewitt, Louise Donnadieu and John Paul McLellan. How do these characters reflect the complexities of social class, status, and wealth?

6. *The God of the Woods* unfolds across multiple decades, and different timelines are woven together to create a nuanced portrait of several generations of different families, rich and poor. How did the braided timelines add to your reading experience? Why do you think Liz Moore chose to tell the story in this way?

7. The Van Laar's estate is named Self-Reliance, which is a quality the family's original patriarch was said to value and want to instill in his descendants. Did he succeed? How do you think this idea of self-reliance be defined differently by the different generations and characters in the book? How does the novel's ending reflect back on this idea? Who, in your mind, is the most self-reliant character in the novel?

8. As a member of a disadvantaged family, camp counselor Louise faces much worse repercussions for Barbara's disappearance than does her counselor-in-training, Annabel, the daughter of wealthy, well-connected parents. But money isn't the only determination of power in the story: Alice Van Laar has a lot of money, but little status or control over her surroundings. And TJ has little money but manages many acres and people. Discuss the relationship between power, money, and personality in the book. Which characters are rich in some ways but not others? Which characters ultimately have the most influence and control?

9. Caretaking is a resonant theme in the book, across the different characters' backgrounds. Alice and Peter have different ideas about how to care for their son Bear and their daughter Barbara. Vic Hewitt is a groundskeeper who takes care of the Van Laar preserve; later, T.J. is a caretaker for her father. Louise wants to care for her younger brother Jesse before it's too late. Compare and contrast these models of caretaking. What are the social forces that shape these models?