

Women in Sunlight

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. The ingredients, cooking, and eating of food are prominent features of *Women in Sunlight*. What did you take the descriptions of food to represent? For instance, what is the importance of hospitality and the sharing of meals, and do you see a connection between cooking and other forms of creativity?
2. At Susan's beach house, she and her two new friends, Camille and Julia, discuss the expectation that life should "simplify" with age. Resisting this, they move to Tuscany "where life does not simplify, it complicates" (p. 51). Do you think this vision of Italy is correct? In what ways do their lives become more complex? Does life, in fact, simplify in other ways?
3. Susan references a theory that, in dreams, houses and their rooms represent the parts of one's self. Do you think that the spaces the women occupy reflect the current states of their hearts and minds? How might Villa Assunta in Tuscany speak differently than their houses in America or the living units at Cornwallis Meadows?
4. Consider the following passage: "Why, they wonder after family life ended, didn't more people banish loneliness and live together? Things, they conclude. People can't part with their stuff, their mother's stuff, attics and basements full of stuff" (p. 91). How do the women deal with the emotional weight of their things and the history they carry? What might be the importance of learning to "let go" of material possessions?
5. What were your first impressions of Susan, Camille, and Julia? What contrasting personality traits do they have, and how might they influence or inspire one another? How are they each stimulated and transformed by life in Italy?

6. What is Margaret’s purpose in the narrative? How might her relationship with Kit compare to the friendships among the other women?
7. As the women transition to life in Europe, what are the divergences from life in America? Did you notice any cultural gaps between the American women and the Italian locals?
8. Why do you think Julia considers the women innocent when they first arrive in Tuscany? Is this a trait that inevitably comes with traveling to new places? In what moments could you see them lose aspects of this innocence?
9. Julia channels her culinary passion and publishing experience into writing *Learning Italian*, which chronicles her journey of cooking the country’s food and learning its language. Could you read *Women in Sunlight* as, like Julia’s project becomes, a newcomer’s guide to life in Italy?
10. Thinking back on her time in Boulder, Kit remarks that “[t]hough I loved the town, it was not my place in the universe.” What, in your view, determines one’s place in the universe? Why is it that we are compelled to return to some places and not others?
11. How might *Women in Sunlight* challenge definitions of “home,” or of the family as a nuclear unit? Are we readers encouraged to be more flexible in our understandings of these concepts? Do you find the idea of communal living practiced in *Women in Sunlight* appealing?
12. What did you make of Julia’s tenuous relationship with her daughter, Lizzie, and Wade, her estranged husband? How do you think you would react if placed in Julia’s position?
13. As she reconnects with her artistic flair, how does Camille learn to grapple with grief and the death of her husband? What were your interpretations of her “paper doors”?

