

Discussion Questions

1. Before the book started, how familiar were you with colonial pre-America?
2. Did you learn anything new about colonial life?
3. What do you think the author is saying by dividing the book into Acts, and what did you get from that?
4. Do you think Ruth's decision to leave Shrewsbury caused tragedy or hope? Would you have made the same decision?
5. If you had to flee your home, what possessions would you take?
6. What did you learn about winter in colonial New England?
7. In a time when most people in colonial settlements would have held deep spiritual beliefs, how do you think the town's reaction to Ruth tested her faith and belief system?
8. What do you think was the significance of Frankie on board *Primrose*?
9. What similarities and differences did you find in the portrayals of the two towns? How are both or either similar to or dissimilar to towns you know today?
10. What did you learn about traveling by sea? How has it differed from your own sea-traveling experiences, if any? Do you think you could have withstood a 1680s seafaring journey to the West Indies?
11. Did you feel that Ruth's and Owen's relationship was born of opportunity, necessity, genuine affection, or something else entirely?
12. How do you think this romance was similar to or dissimilar to romances of people at the time?
13. How do you think you would have fared as an independent woman at this time?
14. Which single word would you use to describe each character: Ruth, Owen, Captain Townsend, Valentine, Isabel, Samuel, Helen Starks, Rosalie? Elaborate, if you'd like.
15. All of the characters have flaws. What were some of the flaws you noticed, and what choices did the characters make within those flaws that you would have made differently? Which flaws felt the most human to you? Which flaws made you think of something similar inside yourself? Which flaws might have been strengths given different circumstances?
16. If you could pick a character and change a decision or outcome of that character's actions at any point in the book, which character and action would you choose, and what would you hope for a new outcome?
17. How did Samuel's possession of enslaved people challenge or reinforce what you think/thought about slavery in the North? And about slavery in pre-/America before the Revolutionary War and/or Civil War eras?

18. What decisions do you think Ruth could have made differently to have changed her predicament? How easy do you think those decisions were to make? And how would you have made them differently?
19. Do you think Samuel deserved to die? What would you have done if you had been in Ruth's position at that moment? Do you think Samuel had redeeming qualities that might have been strengths under different circumstances?
20. Did you expect Owen to return, and what was your reaction when he did?
21. What symbolism did you find in the fox at the beginning? The stigmata of the toe Ruth loses? The parallels of science? The coffins on the outskirts of Stonington? The burning of *Primrose*? The name *Primrose*? Ruth rising from the bathtub? The two horses, Copernicus and Arrow? The lilac seeds? The mentioned tides?
22. What significance is there in Martha's paint colors?
23. What symbolism is there in Eunice Crotchett? Do you think she represents a certain figure or a subset of society today?
24. How does Ruth's relationship with Helen Starks demonstrate how friends can influence each other?
25. Do you think the author's representation of the Pequot was accurate? What in the story challenged what you already thought about the Pequot? American Indians, in general?
26. How did the study and inclusion of the Pequot language help or hinder the story?
27. What does Ruth's relationship with Askook say about befriending those who are culturally or racially different from you, and the benefits and/or consequences of it?
28. How did Valentine being a Quaker challenge your perception of the religion? How different do you think Valentine would have been from Quakers of the time?
29. Throughout the book is the theme of persecution. How do you think colonial religion, prejudices, and gender inequality perpetuated this persecution? Did the book present these colonial "ideals" in any new light to you? Or did it stay in line with your present thinking about the time period?
30. What kinds of similarities in judgment, punishment, and treatments of outcasts are echoed in today's society?
31. How did the book change or reinforce your perceptions of gender roles and/or limited views of science in the time period?
32. What does this book tell you about the theme of home and the value of belonging?
33. What does the book tell you about how people are shaped by experiences in their youths? How do you think Ruth was shaped by her childhood? How do you think Owen was shaped by his childhood? How do you think both characters might have been different had their childhoods been different?
34. In the overall arc of the story, do you think it came full circle?
35. Given what we know about Ruth, how do you think she would have fared in France after the end of the book?