

## Discussion Questions

*From Reading Group Guide from HarperCollins Publishers*

1. Why do you think the author made the decision to begin the story of Two Feathers and the Glendale Park and Zoo with “When It Was”? What does this introduction reveal about the story’s setting and historical context? What major themes and motifs of the novel does this preface introduce? How do you think your view of the book would have been different if the author had not included it?
2. How is Two treated in comparison to the other women at Glendale? Why didn’t Helen Hampton “feel like she could get as familiar with Two as she could with the other residents” (page 10)? How does Two cope with this? After she is injured, why doesn’t Two want her parents to have to travel on the train to get to her? Although Two acknowledges that she is treated differently because of her race, does she ever challenge this? Why or why not?
3. Discuss how the book creates a dialogue about racism and segregation in America. Two admits that she has been treated with prejudice both on the road and on the ranch. Where do we also find instances of this during her time at Glendale? How does racism influence the way that Two interacts with other people, such as her friend Hank Crawford? How is Crawford impacted by the segregation of 1920s Nashville? How does his status as a member of a landowning Black family affect this? When Crawford shares the news that his cousin has been beaten, how does Two respond to the news? How does she relate to Crawford’s experiences with racism and segregation, and where do their experiences diverge?
4. What does Clive observe about Mr. Shackelford’s views on race? Why does he say that Shackelford’s views were “more peculiar than most” (page 117)? How does Shackelford consider his own views on race? Do you think that he is aware or unaware of his own racism? Discuss.
5. Two eventually learns that Glendale is built upon a cemetery. How does she feel about this? Who was involved in the desecration of Noel Cemetery? What do they remove from the graves and what do they do with the items they find? How did Mr. Shackelford view his own involvement with this, and how did this change “as he’d approached the twilight of his life” (page 102)? When did he realize this alteration in his thinking? What questions does the novel suggest about archaeology, ownership, and the history of museums and collections?
6. Who is Jack Older, and why is he convinced that he is Native American, even though he is white? As a child, what does he misunderstand about his parents’ farm that further reinforces this notion? Why does he think that Two Feathers “seemed like his destiny” (page 46), and how does this influence his actions? Discuss how his character serves as a catalyst for the exploration of the larger themes of appropriation and entitlement.

“When Two Feathers Fell From the Sky” by Margaret Verble

7. How is Clive Lovett affected by PTSD? How do the other characters, including his boss, Mr. Shackelford, seem to respond to this? When Clive begins to form a relationship with Helen, what doesn't he want her to know or to see about him? Is he ever able to overcome this? How does his experience in the cave with Two ultimately change Clive and “[shift] earthquake-like his entire view of existence” (page 105)?
8. How does Helen respond when Clive inquires about Native Americans being prior inhabitants of the land they are on? What does her response reveal about the dominant narratives surrounding American settlement? What makes these narratives so problematic? Do you think that this has improved today? Why or why not?
9. What was the Scopes trial and why was it both popular and contentious? What “two large underlying and conflicting ideas” (page 141) did it bring into public view? Where did Clive stand on this issue, and what does Helen think about this? What did Clive mean when he said to Helen that “if William Jennings Bryan could've seen my monkeys, he might've rethought his position” (page 141)? Where does Two Feathers stand on these same issues? How does the novel ultimately reconcile the two “large underlying and conflicting ideas” brought to the surface by this trial?
10. Who is Little Elk and what was his life like? Why is he interested in keeping watch over Two Feathers? Why does he believe that he has been sent back to this area? What makes him decide that he should kill Pale Jump?
11. After Two Feathers is forced to become more sedentary as a result of her injury, how does her outlook on life change? What does she say that being inactive makes her see? How does it help her to better understand the stillness of her family members? What impact does this have on her relationships with the animals and nature, and how does it reshape her view of death?
12. Why does Two say that she doesn't have any formal religion? Despite this, what are some of Two's spiritual beliefs and why does she choose not to speak about them at Glendale? What did her Papaw mean when he said that “the whites' religion is one of their greatest evils” (page 338)? How does Two think that this religion changed people's outlook on the natural world?
13. Discuss the conclusion of the book. Who was ultimately responsible for the death of the animals at Glendale and what becomes of them? Why do Two, Clive, and Crawford make the choice to hide the evidence of murder at Glendale? Were you surprised by their choice? Why or why not? Who or what do they feel that they are protecting by doing this?