



### Discussion Questions for RED CLOCKS by Leni Zumas

1. The novel begins with an epigraph from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*: "For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too." How do you see this quote pertaining to *Red Clocks*?
2. Five women are at the novel's center: the Biographer, the Wife, the Daughter, the Mender, and the Polar Explorer. Which character do you identify with most, and why?
3. The characters' threads intertwine at the level of plot, but also at the level of form, as the narrative perspective keeps shifting among five different points of view. How does this "braided" structure affect your experience of the novel? What does it suggest about the boundaries between self and other, individual and collective, history and present moment?

4. Ro, Mattie, and Gin are all significantly impacted by new federal restrictions on abortion, fertility treatments, and adoption. How do you respond to their fictional experiences in light of current realities in American politics?
5. During the courtroom trial, the mender reflects: “This predicament is not new. The mender is one of many. They aren’t allowed to burn her, at least, though they can send her to a room for ninety months. Officials of the Spanish Inquisition roasted them alive. If the witch was lactating, her breasts exploded when the fire grew high” (p. 257). Do you think Gin Percival is a witch? Why or why not?
6. Absent loved ones are recurring shadows in *Red Clocks*. Ro’s mother and brother, Gin’s mother and aunt, Mattie’s best friend Yasmine—all are gone, yet they leave significant traces. What roles do grief and loss play in the novel?
7. In the school music room, after a painful conversation with Mattie, Ro rips a poster of pirates (“THEY CAN HIT THE HIGH C’S!”) off the wall (p. 303). Pirates, shipwrecks, and nautical adventure are juxtaposed against domestic/personal crisis throughout the novel. What do you make of this contrast? And how do whales—from *Moby-Dick* to the stranded bodies Mattie mourns on the beach—figure in?
8. How does RED CLOCKS define motherhood?