



Discussion Questions for Sarah Faber's ALL IS BEAUTY NOW

1. How does the setting of Rio de Janeiro reflect the themes in *All Is Beauty Now*? What were your impressions of Brazil before reading *All Is Beauty Now*? Have they changed at all? On p.15, Dora remembers telling Luiza that “A place can’t be everything it ever was forever and ever.” Do you agree? Discuss how the family’s conception of Brazil (including Petrópolis) compares to their ideas about Canada and Florida.
2. Discuss your reaction to the cinematic opening chapter, which is told from the perspective of the community of people who have long been fascinated with the Maurer family. Why might the author have chosen to begin the novel this way? In what ways were your early impressions of

each family member, as described in this first chapter, confirmed or challenged over the course of the novel?

3. In the opening chapter, at one point the community says, “When people are that beautiful, the rot is on the inside.” And yet the chapter ends with “If they go, we dim and grow smaller. And they become mortal after all.” Discuss the community’s relationship with the Maurer family.

4. On p.97, Dora describes the Portuguese term *saudade* as a “longing or nostalgia for a lost place or person, or something beloved that you once had, that you ached for still.” Certain characters in the book are, at times, deeply nostalgic. How does their nostalgia catalyze their behaviour? What are they struggling to let go of? How does this compare with Magda’s and Evie’s desire to look ahead?

5. If nostalgia and regret can be considered different sides of the same coin, what do you think each member of the family comes to regret?

6. How does the family’s ambivalence about their wealth, beauty, and privilege express itself? In what ways has beauty hindered the family?

7. The title is taken from something Hugo says on p.213, during a pivotal moment in the book. What were your initial thoughts about the title? Have they changed? Discuss how the inclusion of the word *now* changes the meaning of the title.

8. Alissa York’s quote for *All Is Beauty Now* describes the novel as being about “the pain of living with those among us who burn more brightly and delve deep into the dark.” Has reading the novel changed your understanding of mental illness? In an essay Sarah Faber wrote about mental illness in her own family, she writes, “I tried to create a character *with* bipolar disorder, not simply a bipolar character.” How would you describe the difference between the two? Can you think of characters in books, movies, or television who are examples of characters *with* a mental illness and those who might be overly defined by their illness?

9. What role does story and mythology play in the novel? In what ways are the family stories that the Maurers tell themselves beneficial? In what ways do they prove harmful? Discuss which stories resonate most with which member of the family and why. On p.154, Luiza thinks to herself, “Perhaps it was in their genes: stories and lies.” Do you agree?

10. On p.35, Hugo mentions a *quincunx*, which the dictionary defines as “five objects set so that four are at the corners of a square or rectangle and the fifth is at its centre.” How does this reflect the way the family emotionally arranges itself both before and after Luiza disappears? What do you make of Hugo’s explanation?

11. On p.57, Carmichael tells Luiza, “This time in your life won’t last forever.” How does this line come to reverberate in unexpected ways for Luiza? Why is Luiza drawn to Carmichael?

12. Why does Evie become so fascinated with the American girl, Brigitta? What lies behind her eventual disenchantment? In the end, does Brigitta “save” Evie?

13. How did you feel about Magda’s and Evie’s awakening to the adult world of secrets and lies? How does each girl fortify herself to face the future?

14. What is the role of voice in *All Is Beauty Now*? How are the characters' perspectives differentiated from one another?

15. There are a few key scenes where characters either revisit or sometimes even re-enact an important moment. For example, on p.42, Dora swims out to sea, trying to imagine what happened to Luiza; and later, we see different versions of the garden and beach scenes. Compare the different "versions" of a scene. What do the differences reveal? What other echoes or inversions were you aware of?