

THRESHOLD

**Book Club
Discussion Questions**

Susan Feathers

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Threshold contains themes and characters that are intended to evoke conversations about the role of place in forming the character and destiny of people, plants, and animals. Climate change is altering the landscape under our feet. What does that mean for each community of people that inhabits a place, a region, or a country?

Use any of the questions below to spark a discussion with your book club, classroom, or community reading group and facilitate the exploration of thoughts and the sharing of ideas with each other.

DUMA, THE GHOST CAT

By including an animal character, the story is broadened to encompass the natural world and other perspectives about events and circumstances.

1. In what ways did Duma's story contribute to the overall story and your understanding of the region? Why do you think the author included the jaguar? How does the author weave Duma's story into the other characters' narratives?
2. How do attitudes and regulations about threatened or endangered species differ among countries, regions, and/or people? What particular issues did the story explore regarding the fate of wild animals in human settlements? About captive animals and the role of zoos?

3. How do you think climate change might alter attitudes and regulations regarding the fates of animals?

LUIS AND KIM

In Chapter 2 the reader learns about the condition of Sonoran Desert plants and animals, and the role of the natural history museum in encouraging the public to conserve the biodiversity of the desert.

1. What are Luis and Kim's concerns?
2. What is the tension that zoo scientists and educators have to balance?
3. If you were in Luis and Kim's position, what would you have done to protect Duma? The museum's animals? What are the problems with releasing captive animals?
4. Is your local zoo or aquarium making plans for climate change?
5. Some zoos have made the decision not to replace endangered megafauna like lions or elephants, but to allow such animals in their displays to pass away naturally without being replaced with others. What do you think about that?

CARLA AND ED

These two characters begin as polar opposites in their attitudes and beliefs about climate change.

1. How do they change as the story progresses?
2. Are they believable characters or not? What makes you think so?
3. Can people change rapidly? Why or why not? What forces acted upon Carla and Ed that might have led to their radical actions?
4. What were Carla's concerns about her pregnancy?

DOLORES AND ROBERTO

Dolores and Roberto return to Tucson, their birthplace.

1. What are the reasons for their return to Tucson? How do they think about community, and what cultural traditions do they draw upon?
2. Dolores is a rare kind of teacher. What makes her so? Have you had a rare teacher?

3. What did you learn about Tucson's history and culture through these characters?

DANIEL, ENRIQUE, AND LUNA

As climate change alters landscapes, the human community will have to adapt and make critical decisions that will affect generations to come. Daniel, Enrique, and Luna are teenagers who each face particular challenges.

1. How does the quote from Albert Schweitzer at the beginning of the book inform you about the author's intent in creating these characters? What do you think the author was saying through them?
2. How are the circumstances for each teen different from those of the others? How are they similar?
3. How do the adults in each teen's life help him or her mature? How do they hinder maturation?
4. Each teen is dealing with loss. Can you describe these losses? How are all of us dealing with loss in relation to climate change?
5. In *Threshold*, each child is assisted through certain kinds of ceremonies. What are they? What is the role of ceremony in meeting the challenges of life?

SONYA, SAMANTHA, AND BOB

Nogales and Tucson—and the Tohono O’odham Nation—are subject to the crimes of the cartels and Mexican mafia at the border between Mexico and the United States. The desire for drugs in the United States continues to fuel the fires of the dark world that the author sketches in *Threshold*. Not only animals get caught up in border conflict, but children and families as well. It is an ongoing tragedy in which both countries and their citizens are complicit.

1. What circumstances and forces form Sonya’s character and career choice? Would you respond to them as Sonya did? Why or why not?
2. Rape is a common war crime across the world, and in times past, when women were considered little more than chattel, it was commonly accepted. Today it is used as a form of intimidation. How does this problem affect your state, your community?
3. Sonya and Sam form a partnership early in their friendship to fight sex crimes against children and women. What examples of similar leadership do you have in your community?

THE COMMUNITY

The author has strong views about the potential of community to solve problems.

1. What are some examples of these views in the story?

2. How does the author regard government? Give some examples. Does this viewpoint resonate with the current national mood or not? In what ways can government play a key role in protecting the rights and welfare of communities?

THE LAND ETHIC

Aldo Leopold, regarded one of America's most important conservation leaders, believed that the idea of community must extend to include the plants, animals, soil, waters—collectively, *the land*—in places where people live.

1. In what ways are people and the land where they live connected? Give examples from *Threshold*. How does the condition of each influence the other? Give some examples from your own community or region.
2. Leopold wrote that people must learn to “live on a piece of land without ruining it.” What are some ways that people can learn to do that? Give a few examples from *Threshold* of instances in which characters think or act in ways that relate to land.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel that this book changed your views on climate change? Why or why not? Pick a scene in which you would have acted differently than one of the characters.

2. If you could change something about this book, what would it be and why?

3. In chapter 4, as Sonya reflects on the plight of illegal immigrants struggling in this country for economic freedom, she thinks that El Norte (the US) is no El Dorado. What seems most true to you?

OTHER RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

The author's website, www.walkearth.org, includes links to sites and organizations whose subjects and mission relate to *Threshold's* themes and characters. Questions and/or comments for the author can be submitted on the same site.

Join a discussion about the Land Ethic—developed by Aldo Leopold in the early 20th century and even more relevant today.

Submit ideas for a sequel—say, something that takes place twenty years later. What will happen to the characters? To the community? What new technologies, and/or human practices and policies, might define the experience of people and animals living then?