

BOOK CLUB To Go!

The Moonflower Vine

By Jetta Carleton

Introduction

The Moonflower Vine opens in the early 1950's with the Soames family gathered on the family farm outside Renfro, Missouri, for their annual summer visit. Matthew Soames, a retired school teacher, and his wife, Callie, are enjoying the last days of summer with three of their daughters and one grandson. The opening scenes paint a touching portrait from the youngest daughter's point of view, of rural life and family ties: strong ties that bring them home on their annual pilgrimage, but only hint at the secrets and sorrows that lie beneath. The last day of their visit coincides with the blooming of the moonflower vine, a flower that blooms only a few days each season at sunset. The moonflower vine symbolizes a silent tribute to their family history and the life changing events that have marked the Soames family. After a heartwarming introduction, the novel is divided into five sections, telling the individual stories and secrets of Jessica, Matthew, Mathy, Leonie and Callie.

(reviewers-choice.com)

About the Author

Jetta Carleton (1913-1999) was born in Holden, Missouri, and earned a master's degree at the University of Missouri. She worked as a schoolteacher, a radio copywriter in Kansas City, and a television advertising copywriter in New York City, and she ran a small publishing house with her husband in Santa Fe, New Mexico. *The Moonflower Vine* is her only published novel.

(goodreads.com)

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Reviews

"Once in a great, great while comes a new book that makes you thankful you know how to read." -*San Francisco News-Call Bulletin*.

"A rare find-a book you can truly enjoy and recall, long after reading it, with sharp pleasure."-*Rita Mae Brown*

"A distinguished achievement."-*Chicago Tribune*
(*durangoherald.com*)

Further Reading

Good Things I Wish You by A. Manette Ansay

The Last Summer of Her Other Life by Jean Reynolds Page

The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Bronte by Syrie James

The Help by Kathryn Stockett

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Possible Discussion Questions

1. At the end of the novel's first section, *The Moonflower Vine* blooms – an event that is repeated, or described, a number of times in the pages that follow (when Matthew and Charlotte are alone, for example, and on the last page of the novel). What is the significance of the blooming moonflower vine? Do you think its significance is different for each character?
2. Throughout the novel, Matthew returns to the cemetery on the hill. What significance does the cemetery have in *The Moonflower Vine* and, more specifically, for Matthew?
3. After visiting Ed with his grandson Peter, Matthew comes to the realization that "fed or hungry, accepted or denied, [Ed] was his own man" (p. 233). What does it mean to be your own man in this novel? Why do you think Matthew envies Ed?
4. In many ways, *The Moonflower Vine* is a novel about freedom. Of its major characters, who is the freest? What does this say about the author's conception of freedom?
5. What is Callie's great shame? Do you feel that this shame intensifies or weakens as the novel progresses? What do you make of the ending of the novel, when Callie ostensibly rids herself of shame?
6. At the novel's end, Callie spots a white heron and cries out, "O God... I love your world" (p. 318). What does the heron symbolize, and why does this bird have such an effect on her?
7. What role does God play in the lives of each character in the novel? How do their initial conceptions of God change as the characters develop?
8. While marriage clearly constricts a number of the characters in this novel, at other times it allows them to explore places they never expected to visit. How do you perceive Jetta Carleton's message about marriage in *The Moonflower Vine*?

(readinggroupguides.com)