

THE SOUND OF A WILD SNAIL EATING by Elisabeth Tova Bailey
BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

THE READING EXPERIENCE:

- 1) There are two protagonists in *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating*, the snail and the human. Did you find yourself drawn to one more than the other? Does that say something about you as a person?
- 2) Which chapter was your favorite and why? Was there a particular phrase, sentence or idea that really intrigued you?
- 3) Did you find yourself reading the book quickly to see what would happen next? Or slowly so that it wouldn't end?
- 4) Although the book covers a year of snail observations, I note in the epilogue that the narrative actually weaves together that year along with the research I did years later. If you think of the story in these two layers, the direct observations and the research years, does it change or deepen your understanding of the narrative and of the bond I formed with the snail?

THE SNAIL & NATURAL HISTORY:

- 5) Had you ever noticed a snail before? Did the book change your understanding of the life of a snail? What did you find most fascinating about the snail?
- 6) Does size and speed matter in your awareness of another life form?
- 7) Do you think of humans as just another species? If you could be any animal, which species would you want to be?
- 8) Did my decision not to name the snail impact the narrative?
- 9) The snail changed my understanding of the natural world as a whole. Did you feel the same way? Why?
- 10) What is your own relationship with the natural world and with other animals?

ILLNESS & HEALTH:

- 11) Are you a patient or a caregiver and how did this illness narrative reflect or expand your own experience?

12) Discuss the real and metaphoric use of the “window” throughout the book. There is the window in the prologue at the hotel near the Alps, the window in the convalescent room, and the window at my bedside when I move back home. Consider the importance of patient environment in palliative care.

13) What did you think of the fact that pathogens that can cause illness are also part of evolution? Humans might not have evolved if it weren't for pathogens. How does it change your reaction to, and understanding of, illness.

14) Whether you are healthy or have an illness, do you ever feel like there is a divide between those two experiences? Do you reach out to friends with health challenges? Do they reach out to you?

15) Do you think that if you were very ill and someone had brought you a snail that you would find yourself watching it?

16) How does one maintain one's outlook when illness—or any other type of challenge—results in numerous losses? Consider the ways in which major challenges reshape a life. What gets you through such challenges?

FINAL QUESTIONS:

17) How did my decision not to name any humans in the narrative impact you as a reader. Why do you think I made that decision?

18) *The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating* is being read by both women and men. Why do you think it crosses the gender gap?

19) Can you explain what this book is about in a single sentence? I keep trying but haven't yet managed to do so.

20) Would you recommend this book to friends and, if so, why? Would it be for the natural history of the snail or the illness narrative? Or just because it's a good read? Or for another reason?