

The Four Winds by Kristin Hannah

Discussion Questions

1. A big theme of the novel is obtaining the American Dream, whether it's through financial independence of owning a farm or traveling to California in search of a better life. Do you think the American Dream is a reality or a myth?
2. Elsa's parents view her as a sickly and unlovable person. How did this treatment impact her later relationships and her search for love?
3. When Elsa meets Rafe, everything changes but not in the way either of them expected. Rafe was set to go to college but once Elsa is pregnant with his child, those plans are canceled. Let's talk about the impact of Elsa's pregnancy on all parties involved.
4. We flash forward to 1934 and the farm is experiencing a severe drought. Both Rafe and their daughter Loreda are dreamers and believe there's more to life than just the farm. Let's talk about the similarities they share and how different it is from Elsa.
5. Why do you think Loreda became so resentful of Elsa?
6. After trying to convince Elsa to leave behind the farm, Rafe eventually leaves the family behind. Why did Elsa initially refuse to move away from the farm? What do you think happened to Rafe?
7. Ant experienced extreme sickness from the impacts of the dust storms, which finally forces Elsa to make the decision to move the family to California. What would you have done if you were in Elsa's position?
8. Elsa thought the children's grandparents would join them on the journey but they refused to leave behind the land. Loreda says "they're like a plant that can only grow in one place." Let's discuss what Loreda is saying here.
9. California is promised as the land of "milk and honey" and opportunity. But when Elsa and her family arrive in the state, they instantly realize reality is much different. The locals shun the new visitors and label them as dirty "Okies." And the only "opportunity" is a life of poverty. Comparing the devastation of the farm to the hardships of the camps, what do you think was harder for Elsa and the family?
10. With the extreme poverty conditions, there's often remarks about how it's inconceivable that this is taking place in America in the '30's. What are your thoughts on this and the similarities to the present day?

11. Loreda really finds her voice after going to the Communist movement meeting and being introduced to Jack. Let's discuss Loreda's new found activism and how that carried on to every decision she made going forward.
12. Initially hesitant of Jack and his ideals, Elsa ends up falling hard for him—and experiences romantic love for the first time. What did you think about their romance?
13. Jack calls Elsa a warrior. What's the definition of a warrior to you?
14. What did you think about the ending and Loreda returning back to California to attend college?
15. Do you have a favorite quote or scene in the story?
16. What lessons can be learned from this time in history?