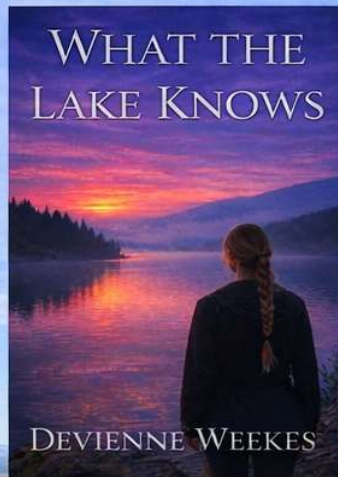


WHAT THE LAKE KNOWS

Book Club Discussion Guide



Devienne Weekes

Discussion Questions • Author Note • About the Author

ABOUT THE BOOK

When repairs to the Pine Valley dam force the reservoir to drain, the lakebed slowly reveals the town that once stood beneath it—streets, foundations, and the outlines of lives interrupted decades earlier.

For most people in Hillsborough, it's a curiosity.

For seventeen-year-old Emily Warren, it becomes a question.

Sixty years earlier, Clara Jennings disappeared on the night of graduation. The town accepted the simplest explanation: she left and never came back. But as the water recedes and the shape of the old town begins to return, Emily starts to hear stories that don't quite match.

What began as a mystery long settled begins to shift. As pieces of the past surface, Emily finds herself drawn deeper into a history the town has quietly agreed not to examine too closely.

Then she discovers the cellar—and the truth the town buried sixty years ago.

— Some towns disappear. Others wait beneath the water. —



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The idea for *What the Lake Knows* began with a landscape I've known most of my life.

I grew up boating with my family on Canyon Ferry Reservoir in Montana, a lake that swallowed an entire town when the dam was built. Today I live down the road from Clark Canyon Reservoir—another lake that covered a town and left its history beneath the water.

One place in particular stayed with me: Cemetery Island in Canyon Ferry. As a child, we would boat out to it and walk among the graves of a town that no longer exists. Even then, it felt like standing inside a story whose ending had been lost.

Over the years I found myself wondering about the people who once lived in those places—what it meant to leave a town behind, and how communities carry their histories forward after the landscape itself has changed.

What the Lake Knows grew out of those questions.

Like the town beneath the lake in the novel, some stories never fully disappear. They simply wait for someone to notice them again.

*And sometimes the hardest question is not what happened in the past—
but what we choose to do once we know the truth.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The lake functions almost like a character in the novel. How does the draining reservoir change the town's relationship with its past? What does the reappearance of Evansville symbolize for Emily and for the community?
2. At the beginning of the novel, Emily isn't trying to solve a mystery. What first sparks her curiosity about Clara Jennings? Why do you think some people feel compelled to look deeper into the past while others prefer to leave it alone?
3. Small towns often develop shared stories about their history. How does the town's version of Clara's disappearance shape how people react when Emily begins asking questions?
4. Emily's relationship with her grandmother Martha is central to the story. How does Emily's understanding of her grandmother change over the course of the novel?
5. Memory and storytelling play an important role in the book. Several characters offer different versions of past events. Why do you think people remember—or tell—the same story differently?
6. The discovery of the cellar marks a turning point. How did that moment change the tone of the story for you? Did it confirm suspicions you already had, or raise new questions?
7. Tom helps Emily piece together parts of the town's history. What role does he play in Emily's journey? Do you see him more as a guide, a witness, or something else?
8. The resurfacing town forces people to confront buried history—literally and emotionally. What parallels do you see between the physical uncovering of Evansville and the emotional uncovering happening within Emily's family?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

9. Emily eventually faces a difficult moral decision about what to do with the truth she discovers. What responsibility does she have to the past, to the town, and to her family?
10. If you were in Emily's position, would you reveal what she learns about Clara's disappearance? Why or why not?
11. Do you think Martha should be judged entirely by the moment that led to Clara's death, or by the life she lived afterward?
How much should a single act define a person?
12. The town lived with a comfortable explanation for Clara's disappearance for sixty years. Do communities sometimes *choose* the version of the past that is easiest to live with?
13. If the reservoir had never been drained, the truth might never have surfaced. Do you think some truths are meant to stay buried, or is it always better for them to come to light?
14. The story ends without a dramatic public reckoning. How did you feel about the ending? What do you think Emily carries forward after learning the truth?
15. Looking back on the novel as a whole, what do you think the lake ultimately represents? Memory? Time? Secrets? Something else?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Devienne Weekes is a Montana writer whose work explores memory, place, and the hidden histories that shape small communities.

She grew up boating on Canyon Ferry Reservoir, a lake that submerged an entire town, and now lives near Clark Canyon Reservoir—another landscape where the past lies quietly beneath the water.

Those places, and the questions they raised about the lives once lived there, inspired her debut novel, *What the Lake Knows*.

QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR

Book clubs sometimes enjoy asking the author a few questions after finishing the novel. Here are a few readers often ask:

- What first sparked the idea for *What the Lake Knows*?
- How much of the setting was inspired by real places in Montana?
- Did you know how the story would end when you began writing?
- Was Emily based on anyone in particular?
- What do you hope readers take away from *the story*?

————— Connect with the Author —————

Devienne Weekes

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