

The Lightkeeper's Daughter

Discussion Questions

1. *He, too, is like the mussel, she thinks. He's rooted to his island; his byssus is just as strong. To hear him loose would kill him* (p. 82). Murray thinks of Lizzie Island as a paradise and can't imagine living anywhere else. How do Hannah's, Squid's, and Alastair's views of the island differ from Murray's - and from each other? Do they all *need* the island in the same way? Imagine growing up on an island with no one but your family. In what ways do you think you'd turn out differently?
2. Assuming you didn't grow up on a tiny island, how has where you live shaped your identity? Think about geography, climate, local society, economic conditions, etc. Draw parallels between your life and the plot of *The Lightkeeper's Daughter*.
3. There are many secrets in this story. What major revelations occur late in the book? What do Hannah and Alastair, in particular, think or feel that they don't tell anyone else? How does keeping secrets affect a relationship?
4. Alastair says, "Don't do something if there's a single person - anywhere - that you don't want to know what you're doing" (p. 66). Do you agree with this principle? Are there exceptions? (And don't say planning a surprise party!)
5. *As [Murray] took each book from the box, he set it onto one of the four stacks he was making: one for each McCrae. Hannah looked at the titles and saw how he was building Alastair and Squid, and even herself, into the people he thought they should be* (p. 127). In a variety of ways, Murray exerts a strong influence on the family. Why does he play such a powerful role, especially compared to Hannah? How does Murray's vision of what each family member should be differ from each member's vision for himself or herself? What is Murray's vision of himself? Do you think it changes after Alastair's death and after Squid leaves the island?
6. The characters have different ways of dealing with conflicts and problems. Squid bounces from topic to topic, Hannah becomes resentful, Alastair isolates himself in his writing and his work. Flesh out each character's responses to problems, including Murray's, and find examples in the book. Whom are you most like?
7. Describe Squid's relationship with Alastair. Are Squid's feelings for Alastair different from Alastair's feelings for Squid? What do they like about each other, and how do they disappoint each other? Does the book imply that their love for each other develops a sexual aspect?
8. Look again at Alastair's diary entries. What themes, or major questions, arise? What does Alastair want? What do you think he needs?

9. What does the whale symbolize in this story? Recall its various appearances throughout the book, Alastair's work on whale song, and what he writes about drowning. Why does the whale need to die at the end of the story, rather than just leave the water around the island?

10. Extreme events - Alastair's death, Squid's pregnancy - change the family. What do you think would have happened to the characters in the absence of any definitive events? Think about a time in your life when it was hard to change the status quo, even though you knew it needed to be altered. What finally led to change?

11. What idea or lesson from this book can help you think about how you want to live your life? Consider your views on family, raising children, marriage, personal goals, etc.