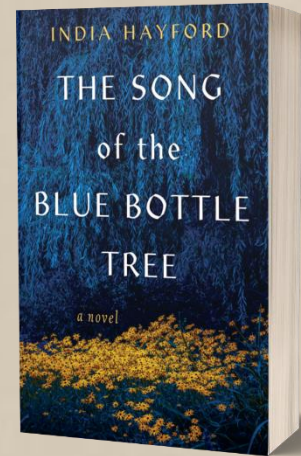


Discussion Questions

to spark conversation and enhance your reading of

The Song of the Blue Bottle Tree

by **India Hayford**



- What do you think is the significance of the blue bottle tree referenced in this novel's title? How does it relate to Genevieve and Mercer?
- Genevieve mentions having a special relationship with jonquils because they would always bloom around her birthday. Are there any elements in nature to which you personally feel a strong connection in a similar manner? If so, what are they and what about them holds meaning for you? If not, why do you think that is?
- Why was an eastern diamondback rattlesnake, a species native to neither northern Alabama nor Arkansas, chosen as a character?
- Why do you think Genevieve's papa chose not to raise her after her mother died?
- The circus Genevieve joins is a sanctuary for outsiders in many ways. How does being a part of the circus help Genevieve at that point in her life?
- How do Genevieve's observations of nature shape her perspectives on life and the world as a whole?
 - The Church of the Flock of the Good Shepherd revolves around the teachings of a single controlling man. What do you think entices people to follow narrow, harsh, and/or unbalanced leaders?
 - What holds Bigger to the living world and prevents him from reuniting with friends and family who died before him?
 - What do you think is the significance of Bigger only being able to go places in the living world if Mercer or Genevieve are there?
 - Genevieve shares a memory of a church picnic where the sumptuous spread of food included dishes such as "Meema's famous spice cake with caramel icing" and "Cora Johnson's bread pudding." Do you or anyone in your family have a special recipe like that? What is it? Does taking a bite stir up specific memories for you?
- Wreath stays with John Luther despite horrific abuse. Why do you believe she marries him in the first place? When does the tide begin to turn in their relationship?
- Why do you think Delilah acts the way she does? Do you think she's a rotten person at heart, or a product of her environment?



- How does Genevieve's arrival in Columbus become a catalyst for change that extends from her family to Maylene to the church? How does Genevieve herself change throughout her time in Columbus?
- The lives of Genevieve and Mercer intersect when she is seeking a home and he is looking to leave home. How does their relationship support their different goals—or does it?
- Do you think Wreath is a good mother? Why or why not?
- Compare the ways the Ives children respond to abuse. What did each do to survive? How did each resist or adapt?
- Why do you believe panic attacks beset Genevieve when she temporarily returns to a profession that had not bothered her in the past? In your own life, have you ever experienced a dramatic change in your tolerance for or relationship to a particular job or situation?
- How is womanhood explored throughout the novel? What does being a woman mean to Genevieve? How does that differ from what Delilah thinks of womanhood and women's roles? What about Jizzie?
- Southwestern Arkansas is an integral part of this novel. How do you think the story would be affected if it was set in a different part of the country? What if it took place during a different decade rather than two years after US troops were first sent to the Vietnam War?
- A reoccurring theme in this novel is the meaning of names and the power they can hold. Why do you think it was so important for Genevieve to change her name at different points in the story? What did you think about Jizzie's relationship to her own name?
- Which character do you think had the biggest influence on Genevieve?

