



The Word for Woman Is **WILDERNESS**

a novel by

Abi Andrews

Reader Guide: Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Erin sets out to deconstruct the trope of the 'Mountain Man.' Who is Mountain Man? What are the character traits of a Mountain Man? Can you think of any Mountain Men, in literature or in popular culture?
2. Initially, Erin intends to emulate the Mountain Man. But over the course of her journey, Mountain Man becomes a more problematic figure for Erin. What do you think Erin finds difficult about the glorification of Mountain Men?
3. Erin sees her trip as a feminist quest. She is claiming her right to the freedom of white men. However, this freedom starts to sit uneasily with her as she encounters other women who cannot claim it like she can. On the Highway of Tears she wonders if her experience could ever be comparable to that of the many native women who have been murdered on the very highway that enables her adventure. How does Erin's quest relate to the questions of intersectionality in feminism?
4. 'Millennial' is often used pejoratively to describe Erin's generation of Internet literate young people. Erin's voice is playfully kaleidoscopic, paradoxical, sardonic, roping in high and low culture, making a mosaic of the ideas of others — it could be said that her voice is distinctly millennial. Do you think the voice of Erin shows a lazy misuse of grammar and language conventions, or do you think it does something more? In what ways do you think it could be said that the language itself is intersectional?
5. Erin finds identification with the plight of whales and dolphins; she says 'cetaceans are women's allies in the war against patriarchy because patriarchy holds the cetaceans down with us.' What do you think she means by this? Do you think patriarchy might affect our relations to nonhumans, and if so, how?



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6. At the same time Erin is troubled the reduction of women to their biological functions, and worries about reaffirming myths that allow patriarchy to oppress, own, and plunder both women and nature. Does Erin fall back into trap of reducing women to nature, or does she overcome this by opening out a space where there is no 'nature' & 'human,' but a queering of these old dichotomies?
7. Erin's trip is framed by danger. But the dangers that chafe against Erin mostly come from strange and familiar men. Do you think Erin is right to put herself in danger? Is she naive? How does Erin's trip relate to the problematic narrative of women 'asking for it,' of 'victim blaming'?
8. 'Solastalgia' is the feeling of distress caused by environmental degradation. Have you ever felt solastalgia? Do you think global climate catastrophe significantly affects individual's mental health, or do you think Erin is lucky that this malaise is the worst of her worries?
9. Erin becomes critical of the colonial powers at play in map-making, documenting, and time-capsulizing; she sees the Voyagers as a corrupting ejaculation into the wilderness of space. Damon represents the opposite — absolute negation of the self, but he chose the extreme of suicide. Perhaps Erin finds a place between negation and propagation; she destroys the documentary, but she keeps mementos of her trip for her own recollection. Why do you think she decides to get rid of the documentary but keep some record of the trip for herself?
10. Ultimately, Erin leaves the cabin happy to return home. Is shrugging off individualism and deciding to return to society a failure, or has she learned something more important than the Mountain Men tried to keep from her all along? Is she really leaving, if she takes something of the place with her in memory?