



Rough Magic: Riding the World's Loneliest Horse Race

By Lara Prior-Palmer
Reading Group Guide

1. Lara Prior-Palmer writes, "Why do we push ourselves? Perhaps not for competition, but for our causeless passions." What do you think she means by this? What are your "causeless passions" and how do they drive you?
2. There are several instances throughout *Rough Magic* of Lara mentioning how her family has shaped her habits; for example, she mentions "My father and my sister know the art of getting on with it—it's locked inside their DNA. 'Just do it', says Aunt Lucinda, daughter of a military general..." How do you think Lara's relationship to her family impacts her motivations and actions in the race?
3. Do you think Lara's initial unpreparedness entering the race might have actually helped her succeed? How so? How does Lara's approach to the race change over time?
4. Lara remarks upon her competitor Devan's overt ambition. She writes, "I used to love winning as much as she does, but it was always accompanied by shame...Somewhere along the line I seem to have learned that overt ambition is distasteful". How do you think their contrasting approaches to the race affected the outcome?
5. One of the biggest themes in *Rough Magic* is the pursuit of freedom and the desire to, in a way, become wild. Describe the ways in which the race turned the competitors "wild".
6. Lara writes, "Few riders had taken the race so seriously in the past, when pairs shared first place, men crossed the finish line holding hands, and riders drank spirits while racing." Do you think Devan's competitiveness from the start altered the atmosphere of the race? How do you think the race would have been different had Devan not competed?
7. Arguably one of the biggest challenges of the race was for riders to adapt to their surroundings and handle various unpredictable situations. What are some of the challenges Lara faced that she adapted well to? What are some that you think she could have handled better?
8. Discuss Lara's relationship with horses. What is it that draws her to them?
9. What are some of the biggest cultural differences Lara faces during her time in Mongolia?
10. Discuss the outcome of the race. What were some of the biggest turning points? Were you surprised by the outcome?