

# BOOK CLUB KIT








# THE NIGHT LAGOON

## BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Please note, the following questions contain spoilers.

- 1 What bearing does the Belizean jungle setting have on Laelia and Ellis? How do you think the scenery is evoked? Do you think the characters would behave differently in an alternative setting?
  - 2 Which scene stood out the most to you, and why? What was the most pivotal moment in the story?
  - 3 How does the isolation Laelia feels impact her and her decisions?
  - 4 How did the book make you feel about hearing loss and tinnitus? How does Laelia's experience of losing her hearing affect her relationship with the world and how she deals with those around her?
  - 5 Discuss the epigraph (Mary Ruefle's 'Voyager' poem) that begins the novel. Why do you think Morey chose to include it? How does it frame your understanding of the story?
  - 6 "Half-truths and little lies; all such make believe." The unearthing of long-buried secrets features throughout the book. Which lies are the most consequential?
  - 7 "I should have seen the signs, of course. But we never do – not really – when we're in love, or some warped iteration of it." How do Laelia's feelings towards Aid change throughout the novel? How do you view their relationship when you consider her past marriage to Simon?
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8 How do you feel about the final unravelling of what happened in the past, and how different characters have covered up the truth? How do you feel as a reader about the secrets that were kept from you?

9 “Sisters are like mirrors; they shine the truth back at you. If you can bear to look.” How are family relationships, particularly the sisterly bond between Laelia and Chloe, explored throughout the novel?

10 What do you think the book is trying to say about the relationship between people and nature?

11 Discuss Laelia’s relationship with Nico. What does he offer her that Aid does not?

12 One of the book’s mentioned in the novel is Paul Theroux’s *The Mosquito Coast*. You could consider also reading this for your Book Club. Why does this book resonate so much with Aid?

13 Consider Laelia’s relationship with Falicia. How do they help each other?

14 Memory and forgetting are key themes in the novel. How do Laelia’s memories of the past and her childhood impact her present?

15 What do you think the future holds for Laelia and her family?



# IN CONVERSATION

## WITH JO MOREY

### What is the novel about?

The Night Lagoon is a psychological suspense, a sweeping family tale that spans generations, and an unravelling of a love story; but ultimately, it's about the lies we tell others — and ourselves — in order to survive. It's an exploration of memory and secrets, why we tell them, and how those falsehoods impact family ties and fracture relationships.

### How did you come up with the idea for the novel?

The Night Lagoon started with an image: A woman, isolated in the jungle — lonely but not alone. I didn't know who she was or why she was there. I scribbled a page of notes about her and shelved them in my study. It wasn't until years later, during a time of upheaval I started writing the novel and properly exploring who she was and why she felt so trapped. I'd recently been diagnosed with an illness which forced me to reevaluate my life. I think the novel was partly born out of that. Laelia finds herself confined by her poor decisions and circumstances, but I wanted her to also have agency. She's not necessarily a 'likeable' character and that intrigued me, to understand why she makes the choices she does, how they influence her relationships and attract her to the wrong sort of people.

I had to explore Belize through Laelia's eyes. I'm a very visual writer so I tried to put myself in her shoes to see and feel her experiences (and the same for Ellis in his 1980s timeline), often before I put pen to paper.

### In the novel, the setting of Belize is itself almost a character. What made you choose this setting for the story?

It's often said that setting is like another character and in The Night Lagoon, I think setting is possibly the main character. I really wanted to convey the overwhelmingly beautiful surroundings, the beaches and jungles in Belize, through all the senses, but especially through sound. Laelia falls in love with this incredible place but the dangerous creatures, the supernatural stories she hears, and the cacophony — particularly at night — add a layer of uncertainty and fear. So setting is everything. The lushness of the jungle, the powdery white sands, the rum-fuelled parties, they all add to the characters' experiences of a shaken paradise.

### How did you go about researching the novel?

I had already travelled to Belize years before I embarked on the novel so I had some memories of it, but I went back again on a proper research trip and to interview relevant people across different areas (e.g. Mayan healers and medicinal experts, orchid collectors) and visit various locations that feature in the novel — temples, restaurants, beaches, and of course, the jungle. I worked with early readers from Belize as well as an incredible Belizean American author, Joey Garcia who was brilliant at pointing out any inconsistencies or areas I needed to check. I also did a ton of desk research and extra reading and spoke to various experts in their fields across orchidology, ornithology, and medicine to make sure I was being as accurate as possible with my depictions. They were all incredibly generous with their time and knowledge. Any errors in the text are most definitely mine!



### Who were your favourite characters to write?

I loved writing Chloe and particularly her dialogue. She's so acerbic and blunt. Her words just seemed to flow and take on a life of their own. I also really enjoyed writing Ellis's sections and immersing myself in a 1980s world viewed through a masculine lens. That's the joy of writing a novel — imagining yourself in other people's shoes and circumstances. I would wake up dreaming of scenarios for him and for Laelia.

### Laelia's hearing loss and tinnitus contribute to her sense of isolation. What were the challenges of writing about her hearing impairment?

Ultimately, The Night Lagoon is about a woman isolated and alone in a coercively controlling relationship. The hearing loss is just one part of Laelia's isolation. Her hearing impairment adds to her loneliness and causes communication problems. And in Belize, the cacophony of the jungle, especially at night, plays against the tinnitus in her head though she also finds it less stressful than the busy city environments in London where she lived before. I wear hearing aids myself and struggle in social settings, even with them in. I wanted to convey what that experience is like for people who struggle to hear, how exhausting and segregating — and sometimes frightening it can be. I also wanted to explore the stigma and shame surrounding wearing hearing aids, especially for a younger woman. I tried various techniques to show her difficulties on the page and found leaving blank spaces for missing words and parts of words was the most effective way to give some idea of the pieces of conversation she misses.

### What are you working on next?

My second novel is set on the North Island of New Zealand and is about a woman with postnatal depression who goes missing and her estranged, wayward sister who travels over there from London to find her. It explores themes of grief, motherhood and renewal that lie under a cloak of mystery.