



IAM READERS GUILD

Discussion Guide

***Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson**

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1. What did you think of the book? Did you enjoy it? Which characters seemed most vibrant to you?
2. Biblical references to Gilead (a region near the Jordan River) describe its plants as having healing properties. The African American spiritual, "There Is a Balm in Gilead" equates Jesus with this balm. According to some sources, the Hebrew origin of the word simply means "rocky area." Do these facts make Gilead an ironic or symbolically accurate title for the novel?
3. Gilead has a distinctive narrative structure, rich with nearly poetic meditation and literary/Biblical allusions. What do you think of this structure? Did your ideas about it develop as you read the book?
4. One of the most complex questions for the narrator, John, to address is the notion of salvation—how it is defined, and how (or whether) God determines who receives it. How do the novel's characters convey assorted possibilities about this topic?
5. Some reviewers have said that Jack is the most intriguing character to pop up in American literature in a while. What did you think of Jack? What did you expect of him? Did he challenge your expectations? (For more of Jack's story, check out Robinson's more recent book, "Home.")

The questions below are merely prompts to get your discussion going. Keep a brief record of the most interesting ideas that come up during your discussion, and after the meeting, send us a summary (around a paragraph long) to post to the Readers Guild blog! (Email your summary to readersguild@internationalartsmovement.org.)