

Lightning Flowers Suggested Discussion Questions



ILLNESS, HEALTHCARE, & DEATH

1. How has your experience in the American health insurance system differed from or been similar to the author's? What did you learn about our insurance and healthcare policies that you didn't already know? Did anything surprise you?
2. Have you experienced a serious illness or health crisis? If so, how did it change your relationship to your body? How did it change your relationship to others? (What lines in the book, if any, struck you as true to your experience?) If you haven't been seriously ill, what was it like to read about becoming sick as a young person or experiencing traumatic surgeries?
3. Has someone in your life experienced a serious illness, and/or have you had to caretake a loved one? How did it affect your relationship with your loved one, including any aspects of your lifestyle that were shared? What was it like to assist in their care? (What lines in the book, if any, related to your experience?)
4. What has been your experience with healthcare providers? Do you feel "seen" and "heard" when you are seeking care? Is this important to you, if the provider in question has the technical skills necessary? Do you usually follow the advice of medical practitioners? Why/why not? Does it feel easy to speak up/ disagree with them?
5. If you *are* a healthcare practitioner, what was it like to read this book? Did any of the situations in Standefer's care remind you of your own experiences with patients? What parts of tending to your patients do you feel most comfortable with, and what aspects are least comfortable for you? Are there lines you find yourself returning to in this book?
6. Although the author falls through the cracks in some parts of the insurance system, she is also an educated white American from a well-off family. In the situations described in this book, how would your body fare? How might

these situations look different in another country, or for someone of another race/class/gender/education level/body size/language/citizenship status?

7. What is your relationship with death like? Do you think about it often? Do you talk about it with others? What gives your life meaning? In order to stay alive, what places, activities, or abilities would you give up? What unpleasant bodily experiences would you accept in order to live? Is there a point at which you would rather accept death than endure certain things? What did this book make you feel grateful for in your own body/health?
8. Does *Lightning Flowers* make you think differently about the current global pandemic? If so, how so?

PLACE

9. What is your relationship to the place in which you live? How deep does it go? What would it be like to have to move away abruptly? How is your experience different from or similar to Standefer's relationship to Wyoming and/or the experience of those she visits in Madagascar and Rwanda?
10. In Madagascar, the author encounters the way seemingly positive economic developments can cause unintended consequences. "Maybe protecting people from change isn't a realistic goal," she writes, "—change being, as it is, an inevitable condition of being alive." Do you agree or disagree with the author? How have changes in the economy of the place you live affected your life? Who or what (if anyone/anything) caused those changes, and did you feel like this person/entity took accountability for them?

GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

11. What objects in your life do you consider sacred? What makes them so? What objects in your life do you consider disposable? What makes them so? How did this book impact your awareness of your own role in global supply chains, from mining to manufacturing to disposal?
12. In *Lightning Flowers*, the author explores how saving her life in the U.S. impacts lives and ecosystems elsewhere, possibly causing others' deaths. By the end of the book, what do you think it means to save a life? Which lives should we prioritize saving as a global community, and, where, when, in what way, given that all medical interventions and innovations also carry costs? What seems "worth it"?
13. In the Epilogue, Standefer refers to "disruptive design"—the idea "that we can use as our starting point in innovation a demand for what must be, and work backward from there." If you could solve one urgent societal problem, what would it be? Brainstorm what it might look like to place that value above

others—in your own life and in systems. What actions would need to occur? (What has gotten in the way of them occurring in the past?)

LIVING OUR STORIES

14. The end of this book is not exactly an ending—because the story isn't over. “You'll want to take [the broken wire] out,” Dr. Rea said, “the day before you have to.” What would it be like for you to live with this kind of uncertainty? Do you live with this kind of uncertainty now? In what way?
15. In *Lightning Flowers*, Standefer's attempts to see a specialist about the broken wire in her heart are so frustrating that she loses touch with her reasons to live. “It was as if a veil had suddenly pulled back before me,” she writes. “If the reasons we have for living are the things and people we love most, all of these too can be lost. A brutal end awaits our bodies, which we will lose in stages, and a brutal end awaits everyone we love, possible every moment... One cannot come to this place and not be changed by it.” She goes on to say that believing in God and a “master plan” or having children “whose lives somehow superseded ours in significance” are two of the ways people convince themselves that living is meaningful. What makes living meaningful to you? (Is it one of these two options, or something else?) Have you ever lost touch with the meaning of life? How did you reconnect with it, if you did?
16. In *Lightning Flowers*' opening pages, Standefer takes three shocks to the heart that change her life. What have been the moments that form a pivot point in your life? How were you different in the “before” and in the “after”? Have you finished living out the question dropped into you on that day that everything changed?