

The Novelist by L.L. Barkat

Questions for Discussion

1. At the opening of the book, the main character Laura resists the concept proposed by author Mario Vargas Llosa—that a writer has “a worm.” What language and past experience does she use to resist it? Why do you think she resists? By the end of the book, has her resistance proved useful?
2. The book includes various writing sources, writers, and genres that Laura contemplates along the way: *Letters to a Young Novelist*, *Plot & Structure*, Mary Shelley, Murasaki and her *Tale of Genji*, fairytales, poetry, autobiographical fiction. What starting-points do these bring to the writing classroom or the writer?
3. What are some key writing lessons that Laura learns through her thinking process?
4. ‘The Novelist’ suggests that a good story will put its main character into a “muddle stage” in the center of the story. In ‘The Novelist,’ does Laura find herself in a muddle? If so, what is its nature?
5. How long does it take for the story to take place? What writing devices does the author use to manage this time frame?
6. What is the big idea in this book?

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7. Name the various characters in the novelist. Who do you like and why? Dislike and why?
8. What do each of the characters in the book represent to a potential novelist?
9. Explore Laura’s description of her relationship with Geoffrey. What do we learn about Laura from it?
10. How is Laura’s relationship with Geoffrey like (or not like) her relationship to writing?
11. How is Laura like, or not like, the old woman in the cottage?
12. Laura worries that if she writes a novel it will be all about her father. Is the story that emerges actually about Laura’s father? How do you know?
13. Who should read this book and why?

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14. Consider the appearance of the letter V. Does it add anything to the story? If so, what?
15. Why do you think Laura reads the Adrienne Rich poems to Geoffrey? Do you see her in the specific lines she chooses to share? If so, how?
16. Discuss some of the main images in the story: tea; the tea basket, screen door, sieves; colors; natural items like trees, shells, moths; temperature; cups; gateways like doors, the bridge, “keys.”
17. What do the various images reveal about the main character, Laura? About the writing process?
18. Consider the notions of fiction and truth used in the novel. What scenes explore it most deeply? What conclusions do you draw from such scenes?
19. Do Laura’s poems serve the story? Does the story serve Laura’s poems? What would we lose if either the poems or the story were removed?