

MARA PURL

Where the Heart Lives

Reading Group Topics for Discussion

1. Characters in this novel drive throughout southern California using every kind of road, from eight-lane freeways in Los Angeles, to the meanderings of coastal Highway 1, to Main Street in Milford-Haven. Is home for you a major city or a small town? Do you return home from road trips with a different perspective?
2. How does Samantha use her journal-writing? To a) gain perspective; b) track her research notes; c) allow her deeper thoughts to surface? How might you find your own journal writing useful?
3. What really happened to journalist Chris Christian? Is it her fault, or is she a heroine? Is Deputy Del Johnson doing a good job investigating her disappearance? Is Del accepted as a local? To what extent does his race influence public opinion of him?
4. Do relationships make us more complete? Or are we already complete? Would you choose a life partner with your head or with your heart? Why?
5. Do you attend concerts? How do you picture the lives of popular musicians? What role does music play in your life? If you had a chance to go backstage, would you?
6. Why do people stay in abusive relationships? Is there an essential difference between emotional and physical abuse? Why does Stacey stay with Wilhelm?
7. Do you know family or friends who are Vietnam veterans? How are they treated today? Do their issues apply to other wars?
8. How are the ideas of maps and mapping expressed in this book? If you were to create an emotional “map” of your life, what would be the key landmarks? Where would the road be straight and easy? Where would it be winding and difficult?
9. In addition to being a writer, Mara Purl was also an actress on *Days of Our Lives*. As a performer, Mara worked from the point of view of her character. As a writer, does Mara drive her novels by plot or by characters?
10. Why is this book called *Where the Heart Lives*? Does this phrase apply primarily to Miranda’s move to Milford-Haven? Or to Samantha’s quest for her son? Or to Sally and her connection to her past and her move to California? How important is the “where” of your life . . . a) physically and b) spiritually?

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<http://marapurl.com/books/where-the-heart-lives/>