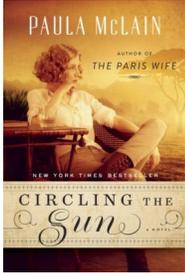


Books by the Stack



Circling the Sun by Paula McLain

Raised by her father and the Kipsigis tribe in 1920s Kenya, Beryl endures painful losses before entering a passionate love triangle and discovering her unconventional true calling.

Why you'll like it: *Expats in colonial Africa, fictionalization history, flawed characters.*

About the Author: Paula McLain was born in Fresno, California in 1965. After being abandoned by both parents, she and her two sisters became wards of the California Court System and moved in and out of foster homes for the next 14 years. She received a MFA in poetry from the University of Michigan in 1996. She is the author of two collections of poetry entitled *Less of Her* and *Stumble, Gorgeous* and a memoir entitled *Like Family: Growing up in Other People's Houses*. She has also written several novels including *A Ticket to Ride*, *The Paris Wife*, and *Circling the Sun*. She has published individual poems and essays in numerous journals including the *Gettysburg Review*, *Antioch Review*, and *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*.

Questions for Discussion

1. At the beginning of the book, Beryl reflects that her father's farm in Njoro was "the one place in the world I'd been made for." Do you feel this is a fitting way to describe Beryl's relationship with Kenya, too? Did she seem more suited—more made for—life there than the others in her circle? Is there a place in your life that you would describe the same way?
2. While it is clear he loved his daughter, do you feel Beryl's father was a good parent? Do you think Beryl would have said he was? Did you sympathize with him at any point?
3. Beryl is forced to be independent from a very young age. How do you think this shaped her personality (for better or for worse)?
4. After Jock's drunken attack, D fires Beryl and sends her away. Do you understand his decision? Despite all the philandering and indulgent behaviors of the community, do you feel it's fair that Beryl was being judged so harshly for the incident?
5. How would you describe Beryl and Denys's relationship? In what ways are they similar souls? How does their first encounter --- outside, under the stars at her coming out party --- encapsulate the nature of their connection?
6. Karen and Beryl are two strong, iconoclastic women drawn to the same unobtainable man. Do you understand how Beryl could pursue Denys even though he was involved with Karen? Did you view the friendship between the women as a true one, despite its complications?

- 7.** Why do you believe the author chose the title “Circling the Sun”? Does it bring to mind a particular moment from the novel or an aspect of Beryl’s character?
- 8.** When Beryl is quite young, she reflects that “softness and helplessness got you nothing in this place.” Do you agree with her? Or do you think Beryl placed too much value on strength and independence?
- 9.** When Beryl becomes a mother herself, she is determined not to act as her own mother did. Do you feel she succeeds? How does motherhood spur her decision to exchange horse training for flying? Could you identify with this choice?
- 10.** After Paddy the lion attacks Beryl, Bishon Singh says, “Perhaps you were never meant for him.” Do you think that Beryl truly discovered what she was meant for by the end of the novel?

(Questions by ReadingGroupGuides.com)



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