

Lucy Gayheart
Book Club Discussion Questions



1. Cather's use of Nebraska as a setting for her novels is part of what made her work stand out to a national audience. How does place play a role in the novel?
2. Who is the novel about? What is Cather saying about them?
3. What is the importance of the poem "When We Two Parted" by Lord Byron that Sebastian sings? Does it relate to other themes throughout the novel?
4. Is this novel a tragedy?
5. If you have read other Cather novels, how does Harry relate to other central male figures (Jim Burden of *My Ántonia*, Neil Herbert of *A Lost Lady*)? If not, what are the unique characteristics of Harry as a protagonist? Does he grow throughout the story?
6. Many critics identify Harry as the narrator of the novel. How does this perspective change the way you see Lucy? Does it change the way you see Harry himself?
7. How is art treated by different characters in the novel?
8. What are the family dynamics in the Gayheart household? What is so significant about the Gayheart family?
9. What impact does Sebastian have on Lucy? What about Harry?
10. Mockford is a background character in the novel, but he plays an important role in the demise of Sebastian and Lucy. Why is Mockford such an unsettling force in the novel? Does he represent anything?
11. What transformation do we see for each of the three main characters throughout the novel: Lucy, Sebastian, and Harry?
12. Mrs. Ramsay tells Lucy "Nothing really matters but living. Get all you can out of it. I'm an old woman, and I know. Accomplishments are the ornaments of life, they come second. Sometimes people disappoint us, and sometimes we disappoint ourselves; but the thing is, to go right on living. You've hardly begun yet. Don't let a backward spring discourage you. There's a long summer before you, and everything rights itself in time." Cather wrote this novel in her early sixties, does this feel like

Cather's voice coming through? How does this relate to the characters' actions in the novel?

13. How does *Lucy Gayheart* indicate Cather's development as an author as it was her second to last novel?
14. Some of the townspeople suspect Lucy's demise was intentional, but narrative details point towards an accident. As a reader, how do you perceive Lucy's end?
15. Cather was noted to feel that she got "the ending right" for *Lucy Gayheart*. What do you think about the ending? Does it feel "right"?