

Shadows on the Rock
Book Club Discussion Questions



1. Is there a main character in this book? If so who is it? What is Cather saying through this character?
2. In many of Cather's books, there is no epilogue at the end. Why do you think she added one to this book? What does it do for the novel?
3. This was one of Cather's last books and was written late into her life. Does this come through in her writing? If you have read other books from Cather, how does this compare to them?
4. Although Cather grew up Baptist and was familiar with Christianity, she was never a Catholic. What do you think made Cather so interested in Catholicism? What makes Catholicism a compelling theme?
5. The Count is not featured heavily in much of the book, yet he is prominent in the last section titled "The Dying Count." What is the importance of the Count and his eventual demise? How does this affect Auclair and Cécile?
6. What do you make of the friendship between Cécile and Jacques? Why are they friends?
7. Which side story stood out to you the most? How does it connect to the larger narrative in the book?
8. Discuss the intersection of art, religion, and philosophy in relation to *Shadows on the Rock*. What does Cather seem to say about each of these?
9. How does the title relate to the themes and narrative of the book?
10. Could Cather have written this book in a different context or era? What is gained or lost by making the setting late 17th Century Quebec?
11. What is the importance of the female characters in this book? Do they have agency?
12. Health and illness, for both animals and humans, are common motifs in Cather's writing. What role do they play in the book?

13. In her famous 1922 essay “The Novel D meubl ” Cather writes “Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, it seems to me, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the over-tone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself.” Some critics feel that this book exemplifies this notion. How does this excerpt relate to *Shadows on the Rock*? Does it feel like Cather “created” something “not named” in this book? If so what is it?
14. Describe the relationship between the untamed Canadian wilderness and the small port town of Quebec.
15. French philosopher Pierre Charron, not to be confused with the character Pierre Charron, may have been an influence on Cather while researching and writing this book. He wrote about how people naturally desire to find truth. Does this idea about finding truth, whether that be “divine, worldly, or human” truths, come up in the book?
16. When Auclair describes Charron, he says “He had the good manners of the Old World, the dash and daring of the New.” What does this description mean? How does it connect to other ideas in the book? Is this why Cather wrote a historical fiction novel?