

This Is the Place
Reader's Guide

1. The editors chose to include only women's voices in this book. In doing so, are they perpetuating a marginalizing stereotype that home is a woman's place? Did leaving men out suggest their role in creating home is somehow less important? Is this book doing a disservice to gender stereotypes in general? Or is this collection working towards a feminist reimagining of the idea of home?
2. There are several different theories about the accumulation, temporality and importance of the stuff we have in our homes—from furniture to books to sentimental objects. How do the essayists examine these positions? With which theory do you most closely align yourself?
3. How do our family and cultural expectations influence our homes? Think about Sonya Chung ("Size Matters") refuting the argument that "bigger is better"; Kirsten Sundberg Lunstrum ("On Moving Home") coming to terms with her shame on returning to her parents' house; and Margot Kahn ("In the Kitchen") struggling with the concept of stay-at-home motherhood. What expectations of home have you adopted or dispelled? And how have these expectations—or your reaction to them—changed over the course of your life?
4. Many of the political issues up for debate today—in the United States and abroad—boil down to questions about home: *Who is welcome here? Who may be safe here? Who may belong?* In what ways do personal experiences at home affect our views on issues of local, national, and international policy? Has reading this book made you think differently about your homeland or country?
5. Despite our best efforts—smoke detectors, earthquake retrofitting, locks, gates, guard houses and security systems—the safety of our home spaces is not entirely within our control. Why can Dani Shapiro ("Plane Crash Theory") keep her home after her baby almost died, while Debra Gwartney ("Broken Home") cannot after a pedophile violated hers? How does Amanda Petrusich ("Nuclear Family") cope with the danger in her back yard? Is feeling safe at home a fantasy we construct for ourselves because we must?
6. The push-pull of moving—from one house or city to another, leaving a country or homeland, or moving many times over the course of a life—is explored in Kelly McMasters's "The Leaving Season", Lina Maria Ferreira Cabeza-Vanegas's "Alle En La Fuente", Tara Conklin's "The Explorer" and Naomi Jackson's "Between My Teeth". Compare a few of these notions: The itch to move versus the desire to stay put; the way a different place can put a new lens on a life; and the way we can carry home with us no matter where we are.

7. Maya Zeller (“The Privilege Button”) grapples with becoming a homeowner after having grown up homeless. Why does this presumably good move trouble her?
8. Claudia Castro Luna (“The Stars Remain”), Sarah Viren (“Some Notes on Our Cyclical Nature”), and Jennifer De Leon (“Mother Tongue”) all lose something precious to them. In what ways do they each find comfort in their new homes?
9. For Elisabeth Eaves (“Inheritance”) and her parents, the Baja peninsula is a transformative landscape. Moving to Alaska, the cold becomes an element Miranda Weiss (“Cold, Comfort”) equates with home. And the forest, for Elissa Washuta (“Undergraduate Admissions Essay Draft”), is a potent place. What is it about landscape—and about human nature—that is so important to us? What does it mean to have a strong sense of place?
10. How do cultural identity, language, and community play into our feelings about home? Which of the essays highlight these issues most profoundly for you?
11. This collection presents 30 individual women telling 30 individual, personal stories. Do the stories work together to tell a larger story? If so, how? What is that larger story?

Reader’s Guide questions thanks to Courtney Zanosky.