

1. Early in the book, Ptolemy plunges himself into the sea—and nearly drowns—after a series of humiliating experiences. Arsinoe, also, goes to the sea when first confronting her conflicted feeling about rule and her sister. What symbolic role does water play in the narrative? How are characters healed or broken by their relationship with the river and the sea?
2. Arsinoe often recalls Berenice's reign and her own life during that time. How have the experiences she had living under her eldest sister's rule and as a street urchin shaped her worldview? How have those experiences changed the way she relates to power, to the rest her family?
3. p. 434 "[Arsinoe] tried to tease out the fount of [the crowd's] enthusiasm: What, precisely, had her brother promised them? How had he persuaded them of his greatness?" Ptolemy represents an alternative for the common people of Egypt. Why does the populace embrace him so readily over Cleopatra and Arsinoe? How does Ptolemy's popularity reflect contemporary political trends?
4. Throughout the novel, Ptolemy strives to "be a man" and "be a king." What do those titles mean in his mind? In the world around him? In the end, does he achieve these goals?
5. We witness Arsinoe and Alexander's romance entirely from Arsinoe's perspective. If this book were written from Alexander's point of view, how might we view his decisions differently? Would we see Arsinoe in a new light?
6. Were you surprised by the event triggered Arsinoe to take action? After many false starts, Arsinoe finally decides to betray her sister Cleopatra and seize power for herself. What motivates this decision? Is Arsinoe's assessment of Cleopatra's motivations and commitment to Rome correct? What are you willing to sacrifice for a cause you believe in?
7. Arsinoe and Cleopatra begin the novel as close confidants and end as bitter enemies. What drives their division? At what moment, in your mind, does their split become inevitable? Is it caused by each of their individual actions or is their relationship doomed from the start?
8. Emily Holleman is a younger sister herself. On page 180 she writes of the sisters, "They exchanged a brief smile, and Arsinoe felt that familiar warmth, that primal bond she'd never tethered to either parent..." Despite Arsinoe and Cleopatra's many struggles, they are tied by blood. Is blood thicker than water? How is love for one's sibling tested by time and change?
9. As in *Cleopatra's Shadows*, Arsinoe continues to have dark and prophetic dreams. Why do you think dreams are so important to Arsinoe? What role do they play in her understanding of the world? Do you believe in the predictive and symbolic power of dreams? Have you ever had a dream that came true, or that clarified something for you in your waking life? Discuss.