

## The Book of Wanderings by Kimberley Meyer

### Reading Group Guide and More!

#### Discussion Questions

1. What are the possible meanings for the title, *The Book of Wanderings*?
2. What is the difference between travel and pilgrimage? Think back on your own travels. What stands out as the most memorable and why? Do you feel any particular trip you've taken has transformed you as a person? If so, in what way?
3. Other than providing a route along which Kimberley Meyer travels, what does the writing of the Dominican friar she follows, Felix Fabri, give her?
4. Why do you think Kimberley continues to return to various biblical stories, even though she herself remains in spiritual doubt?
5. What other stories or ideas does Kimberley grapple with throughout the book and how do they contribute to the author's central quest?
6. If travel is as much about the journey inward as the journey outward, what is that inward journey towards?
7. How does Kimberley's own understanding of what she is seeking evolve?
8. What, in life, do you seek to understand more fully?
9. How does the relationship between Kimberley and her daughter Ellie shift over the course of the journey?
10. What is home for Kimberley? What is home for you? If the end of the journey is supposed to be home, why do you think Kimberley ends on a note of such radical doubt? And is doubt necessarily a negative thing, or can it have positive aspects to it, too?

#### Play List

Indigo Girls, "Closer to Fine"  
Josh Ritter, "Lawrence, KS"  
Lucinda Williams, "Side of the Road"  
The Frames, "Lay Me Down"  
Bill Monroe, "I Am a Pilgrim"  
Uncle Tupelo, "No Depression"  
Son Volt, "Windfall"  
Doc Watson, "Leaving London"  
Don McLean, "Waters of Babylon"  
Soweto Gospel Choir, "Amazing Grace"  
Mishary bin Rashid Alafasy, "Sura 55: The Compassionate"  
Ralph Stanley, "I'll Fly Away"  
Willie Nelson, "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain"  
Delta Spirit, "Devil Knows You're Dead"  
Nick Drake, "From the Morning"

## Reading List

These are books that Ellie and I have read together or alone and loved and that resonate with the various kinds of journeys we made in *The Book of Wanderings*.

Louise Glück, *Averno: Poems*

In these poems we voyage to the underworld, to the wellspring in particular of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, mother and daughter. Here, Glück struggles hauntingly with our mortal position, its beauty and its suffering.

Elizabeth Bishop, *Questions of Travel*

Another book of poems, this time of travels to Brazil and Elsewhere, meaning the past—Bishop's childhood home in Nova Scotia in particular. These poems, and so many of her others in various collections, examine a landscape and freight its details with meaning.

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

This novel of the Joad family's flight from Oklahoma to California echoes for us in the devastation we saw in many of the places we traveled, particularly the Palestinian Territories and Cairo. It too asks the question Martin Luther King asked: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to *him*?"

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

This metaphysical questing for a certainty that can never be captured speaks to both of us. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote of Melville after a visit, "It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other."

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Though ostensibly the story of a father and son traveling through the dying world, this book perhaps embodies our existential human need to keep moving through the implacable darkness, to carry forward the fire inside.

Willa Cather, *My Àntonia*

A book not of journeying outward but of finding and making a home, of rooting oneself to a beloved place and to one another.