

Reading Group Guide

Discussion Questions

1. Charlotte and Sarah are both Sam's mother, in different ways, and each woman experiences immense emotional turmoil when it comes to losing and reclaiming Sam as her son. Do you empathize with one woman more than the other?
2. What do you think of Charlotte and Jean-Luc's decision not to speak French to Sam? Do you feel Charlotte and Jean-Luc would have made the same decision if they had moved to California in the present day?
3. Sam has a crisis of identity when he's taken to France to live with his biological parents. In Sam's heart, he is American. Do you think David and Sarah should have tried harder to get to know Sam through his American culture?
4. In the novel, both Jean-Luc and Charlotte worry about collaborating with the enemy. In times of war, if collaborating means feeding your family and protecting yourself from violence, can it be justified? Does an individual have a duty to survive for the people who can't?
5. In chapter four, Jean-Luc speaks of silence as a weapon and an act of defiance. Many people today, however, view silence as an act of complicity. How do you feel about Jean-Luc's characterization of silence?

6. In chapter ten, Jean-Luc's fellow patient at the hospital says it's "amazing how quickly people learn when taught with fear." How true do you think this is?
7. Despite living in California for many years, Charlotte still has moments of homesickness. Jean-Luc, however, doesn't grapple with homesickness in the same way. How do you think their different personalities affected the way they adapted to living in America?
8. The concept of the "prisoner" is explored in *While Paris Slept*. The French people were prisoners in their own country after the German invasion. The Jewish people were held prisoner in work camps. Jean-Luc becomes a prisoner in Paris. Sarah calls Sam a prisoner in chapter eighty-five: "I can't stand by any longer, watching his despair, his misery. He's given up, David. He's behaving like a prisoner who can't see a way out. He's losing his will, and he's only a child." How do you imagine prison, or being a prisoner, affects one's sense of identity and self?
9. In chapter twenty-four, Jean-Luc references a line from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. "*On ne voit bien qu'avec le Coeur,*" or "You only see well with the heart." What do you think this means? At the end of *The Little Prince*, the prince realizes that only by exploring the world and one's own feelings can someone truly understand their place in the world. Do you think Sam, as he is portrayed as an adult at the end of the book, embodies this idea?

10. In chapter eighty-four, Jean-Luc asks Sarah if she could put Sam's happiness before her own, even if it meant giving him up a second time. Do you think she and David made the right decision, sending Sam back to America to live with Charlotte?

11. At the end of the novel, you learn that Sam named his baby girl Sarah, after his biological mother. Were you surprised by this decision? Why or why not? How did the news make you feel?