

Book Club Questions – When We Believed in Mermaids

1. Kit and Josie need the ocean to ground them—it is one of the most important touchstones in each of their lives and it is what ultimately lets them find one another again. Do you have a similar connection to something in the natural world?
2. Josie lets her family think she has died in a terrorist attack, all to have the chance to start her life over again without any ties to her past. While one person might find this effort extreme, another person may see it as justified. How far would you go to reinvent your life?
3. When Kit sees her “dead” sister on the evening news, she travels to New Zealand in a quest to track her down. In doing so, Kit unknowingly sets off a chain of events that will impact her own life as well as the one her sister has rebuilt for herself. Was Kit blinded by the need to find her sister, or should she have foreseen the potential ripple effects of this quest? What was Kit’s true motivation in trying to find her sister?
4. When We Believed in Mermaids is a book about two sisters who were both abused and neglected in their childhoods, who deal with their pasts in two very different ways. What’s right? What’s wrong? What is an unforgivable crime and what can eventually be forgiven?
5. Kit is a broken person who doesn’t know how broken she really is. Josie fakes her death in order to recreate her life. Both sisters must confront their past and its secrets in order to move forward in their lives. Which sister has more at stake? Whose story is When We Believed in Mermaids?
6. What do you think about Kit finding love with Javier during this tumultuous time? Was he too much of a distraction for her, or was he key in her ability to find a path to healing?
7. Love, heartbreak, and forgiveness are all woven throughout the past and present aspects of this story, affecting Kit, Josie, Dylan, and their parents. Which of the characters in When We Believed in Mermaids do you think is most worthy of redemption? Who did you relate to more?
8. When We Believed in Mermaids is about the bond between sisters. Do you have sisters and have you experienced this bond? How do our sisters shape us?
9. Writers make a variety of storytelling choices when conceiving their stories and turning them into manuscripts. When We Believed in Mermaids is told between present day and flashbacks into the past of the characters’ lives. Do you like stories that explore a

character's backstory in this way, or do you prefer linear storytelling? What do you think are the merits to either/both?

10. "Reading gives us some place to go when we have to stay where we are," is a quotation attributed to Mason Cooley and is one that Barbara O'Neal embraces. However, Barbara also loves to travel and often includes some of her favorite travel destinations in her books. In *When We Believed in Mermaids*, Barbara explores the surfing culture in both Santa Cruz, CA and Auckland, New Zealand. Do you read books that take you to different locations around the world? Or are you just as content reading about a place you already know? What about books serves as an escape for you?