

Reading Group Guide / Jan 2020

[Where the Crawdads Sing](#) by [Delia Owens](#)

ABOUT THE BOOK

Over 4 million copies sold! One year on the New York Times bestseller list!

For years, rumors of the “Marsh Girl” have haunted Barkley Cove, a quiet town on the North Carolina coast. In late 1969, when handsome Chase Andrews is found dead, the locals immediately suspect Kya Clark, the so-called Marsh Girl. But Kya is not what they say. Sensitive and intelligent, she has survived for years alone in the marsh that she calls home, finding friends in the gulls and lessons in the sand. Then the time comes when she yearns to be touched and loved. When two young men from town become intrigued by her wild beauty, Kya opens herself to a new life—until the unthinkable happens. The second half of the book takes readers through Kya’s twisty trial, all leading up to a shocking, cinematic conclusion. The chilling murder mystery contains “striking echoes” to Owens’ own life and is, perhaps, a *bildungsroman* of sorts. The author and her conservationist former husband, Mark Owens, were at the center of questions about the unsolved 1995 murder of an unidentified African poacher, according to the outlet.

Where the Crawdads Sing is at once an exquisite ode to the natural world, a heartbreaking coming-of-age story, and a surprising tale of possible murder. Owens reminds us that we are forever shaped by the children we once were and that we are all subject to the beautiful and violent secrets that nature keeps.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Delia Owens is the coauthor of three internationally bestselling nonfiction books about her life as a wildlife scientist in Africa, including *Cry of the Kalahari*. Since her family spent some of every summer in the mountains of North Carolina, Delia has a special attachment to the wild and beautiful places of that state. *Where the Crawdads Sing*, her first novel, is based in the lush Carolina coastal marsh. By the time she started university, Delia had decided to pursue a career in science, instead of literature. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from the University of Georgia and a Ph.D. in Animal Behavior from the University of California in Davis. She has won the John Burroughs Award for Nature Writing and has been published in *Nature*, *The African Journal of Ecology*, and many others. She currently lives in Idaho.



FOR DISCUSSION *The suggested questions are intended to help you find new and interesting angles and topics for discussion. May these ideas enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.*

1. The North Carolina marsh where Kya lives has long been a sanctuary for outsiders. How does this setting shape the novel? How does growing up in this isolation affect Kya? In what ways does her status as an “outsider” change how others see her?
2. Why does Kya choose not to go back to school? Do you think she makes the wrong decision? How does Kya’s lack of formal education shape her vision of the world? Would her character be different if she had gone to school?
3. After Jodie and Pa leave Kya alone, she becomes close to Jumpin’ and Mabel. Why are these two adults drawn to Kya? What do they teach her about the world? Do you agree with Jumpin’s decision to protect Kya from social services and to encourage her to live alone in the marsh? Why or why not?
4. Why does Kya’s mother leave in the beginning? Do you agree with her decision?
5. Kya often watches the other young people from town—even nicknaming them “Tallskinnyblonde,” “Ponytailfreckleface,” “Shortblackhair,” “Alwayswearspearls,” and “Roundchubbycheeks.” What does Kya learn from observing these girls? Why do you think she keeps her watching secret? Do you agree with Kya’s secrecy?
6. How is womanhood explored throughout the novel? What does being a woman mean to Kya? How does she relate to the other women in Barkley Cove?
7. Discuss Kya’s relationship with Tate. How does Tate’s understanding of Kya change over time? Is Tate a good partner for Kya? Why or why not?
8. Tate’s father tells him that poems are important because “they make ya feel something.” What does poetry mean to Tate? What does it mean to Kya? How does poetry help Kya throughout the novel?
9. Kya watches fireflies near her shack and notices that the females can change their flashes to signal different things. What does this realization mean to Kya, teach her about relationships, and influence her decisions in the second half of the novel?
10. Discuss how Kya’s observations of nature shape her world vision. Do you think these lessons adequately prepare her for life in Barkley Cove? Do you think human society follows the same rules as the natural world? Should it? Why or why not?
11. In what ways, if any, is Chase a different kind of man from Tate? Is one man better? Are their differences biological or learned? How does Kya see each man?
12. In the end of the novel, Kya thinks, “Most of what she knew, she’d learned from the wild. Nature had nurtured, tutored, and protected her when no one else would. If consequences resulted from her behaving differently, then they too were functions of life’s fundamental core.” What does she mean? Do you agree with her philosophy? What do you think it means to be a good person? Do you think Kya is a good person? Why or why not?
13. Were you surprised by the verdict in Chase’s murder trial? What about the ending of the novel? Do you agree with Tate’s final decision? Why or why not?