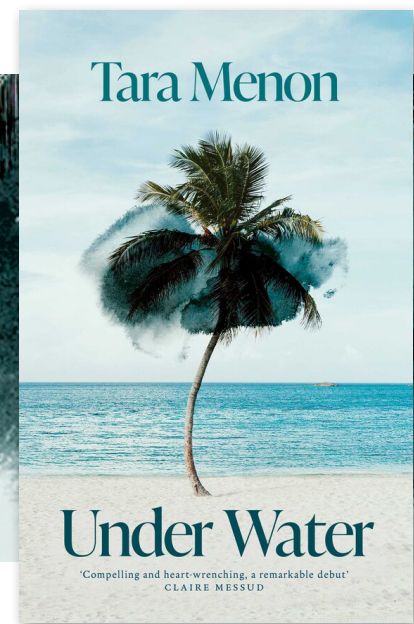


Under Water

Reading Group Guide



Questions for discussion

1. Marissa argues that language does not adequately describe the love and grief associated with friendship. Do you agree? How does the novel challenge conventional ideas about which relationships are considered worthy of mourning?
2. Early in the novel, Marissa reflects that people often ask whether she and Arielle were sisters or lovers because they struggle to understand the depth of their bond. How would you describe their relationship?
3. At the end of the novel, Marissa asks, “Why didn’t you swim?” before recognizing her own misplaced anger. What did this moment reveal about the nature of grief?
4. The novel suggests that grief is not something that ends, but something that changes shape over time. By the final page, do you think Marissa has found healing, acceptance, or simply a new way to carry her loss?
5. What did you make of the novel’s final scenes with Marissa returning to the island and swimming again among the manta rays? Did you see the ending as hopeful?
6. The novel continually links personal loss with ecological loss. Why do you think Menon chose to intertwine grief for a friend with grief for endangered species and disappearing ecosystems?
7. What significance do manta rays hold within the novel? Why do they become such powerful symbols?
8. The novel asks readers to pay attention to what is disappearing around them. What emotions did this evoke for you?
9. Marissa becomes obsessed with disasters after the tsunami. Why do you think she follows storms, earthquakes, and catastrophes so closely?
10. Several passages suggest that animals sensed the tsunami before humans did. What role do animals play in the novel’s understanding of knowledge and survival?
11. The author notes that people often describe catastrophe as “spectacular,” while environmental destruction is frequently quiet and gradual. Did the novel change how you think about environmental crises?
12. Which scene stayed with you the longest after finishing the novel?