



COMMON READING DISCUSSION GUIDE

Flight Behavior

Class of 2024

1. Although narrated in the third person, the events of *Flight Behavior* are filtered entirely through Dellarobia's point of view. Why might Kingsolver have chosen to privilege Dellarobia's point of view in this way? What are the benefits and limitations of seeing this story through Dellarobia's eyes alone? How would the novel be different if it were written from another character's point of view—say, Ovid Byron or Hester Turnbow?
2. In *Flight Behavior*, the monarch butterflies and their unusual flight pattern end up symbolizing many things to many people. While some Feathertown residents interpret the presence of the butterflies as a religious miracle, for example, Ovid and his students understand them as a sign of impending environmental disaster. What else do the butterflies come to represent over the course of the novel, and for whom? What is *flight behavior*, and who exhibits it? How does Dellarobia's relationship to the butterflies, in particular, evolve over time?
3. *Flight Behavior* embodies scientific and religious leadership in the characters of Ovid Byron and Bobby Ogle, two men whose initials are (not accidentally) inverses of one another. These characters, who never share a scene, at first appear to be polar opposites. Bobby is an insider and a religious leader, who commands respect in the Feathertown community. Ovid is an outsider and a scientist, whose presence in this community raises curiosity and suspicion. Yet both are leaders and teachers, with magnetic personalities and devoted followers; they even carry themselves with a similar "air" (257). Consider the influence that Bobby and Ovid exert in their respective communities. What makes them authorities in their fields, i.e., why do people listen to them? Is either one equipped to influence communities *beyond* those that already support him? Why or why not?
4. Throughout the novel, a dizzying array of sources provide conflicting accounts of the monarch butterflies' presence in Feathertown and of climate change science more broadly. In Chapter 10, for example, Dellarobia struggles to understand Cub's trust in Johnny Midgeon, a radio host who denies climate change. "All knowledge measured, first and last, by one's allegiance to the teacher," she concludes (261). How fair is her assessment, in your opinion? Does *Flight Behavior* offer any examples of allegiances shifting from one type of source to another?
5. Ovid insists that his role as a scientist does not include wading into "the public debate," and resists the idea of addressing popular audiences on climate change—although Dovey's YouTube video ultimately makes him a viral Internet phenomenon (323). In your opinion, what role should scientists—and academics more broadly—play in educating the public about climate change? Do scientists like Ovid bear a responsibility to speak directly to the public? If



COMMON READING DISCUSSION GUIDE

Flight Behavior

Class of 2024

so, what forms of media should they use to reach public audiences? Ovid's showdown with Tina, for example, poses YouTube as an unfiltered alternative to cable news. Do you agree?

6. In Chapter 11, Ovid and Dellarobia discuss the unpopularity of climate change science both in her community and the broader public. "I'd say the teams get picked, and then the beliefs get handed around," Dellarobia explains. "Team camo, we get the right to bear arms and John Deere and the canning jars and tough love and taking care of our own. The other side wears I don't know what, something expensive. They get recycling and population control and lattes and as many second chances as anybody wants." (321). In Chapter 13, meanwhile, Ovid and Juliet rearticulate this argument as "the theory of the territorial divide." They discuss it in "unfamiliar" academic terms, which initially prevent Dellarobia from recognizing the theory as her own (395). In your opinion, how accurately does *Flight Behavior* reflect the divides—of region, education, and class, among others—that inform contemporary debates about climate change? Do you agree with Dellarobia's assessment that "the teams get picked, and then the beliefs get handed around"? Relatedly, do you believe that Dellarobia and Ovid ever fully bridge the "territorial divide" between them? Why or why not?
7. Early in the novel, Kingsolver reveals that Bear Turnbow intends to sell the forested land on his property to a logging company. Although the family eventually convinces him not to sell, the threat of logging—and of ensuing mudslides—looms ominously in the background. In your opinion, how effectively does *Flight Behavior* address the influence of large-scale industrial and corporate forces on climate change? Does Kingsolver adequately reflect the tension between economic and environmental priorities, both in Feathertown and beyond?
8. In the novel's first chapter, Dellarobia's solo trek into the woods leads to her stunning discovery of the monarch butterflies. In the novel's final scene, Dellarobia—once again solo—witnesses a parallel natural event from the hilltop behind her house. What do you make of this conclusion? Why do you think Kingsolver chose to end the novel in this way? Does the ending reinforce or detract from the novel's message about climate change?
9. What does *Flight Behavior* accomplish, that another kind of book on climate change—a scientific text, a legal history, an economic account—could not? What is fiction uniquely positioned to bring to conversations about climate change? Are there limits to what fiction can accomplish?
10. Are there audiences whom you feel would be less convinced by the novel's climate change arguments than others? If so, is there another kind of book that these audiences would find more convincing?



COMMON READING DISCUSSION GUIDE

Flight Behavior

Class of 2024

11. Would you recommend *Flight Behavior* to other readers—friends, relatives, classmates? Why or why not?