



FLATIRON  
BOOKS  
NEW YORK

# *Migrations*

## Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Migrations*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Migrations*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. The novel's epigraph is taken from a poem by Rumi: "Forget safety. / Live where you fear to live." How does that directive resonate throughout Franny's life? Do you think it's good advice?
2. Discuss the novel's first lines: "The animals are dying. Soon we will be alone here." How does the disappearance of wildlife in mass extinctions shape the characters and plot? What are the similarities and differences between Franny's world and our own? Would you describe this novel as dystopian? Why or why not?
3. Arctic terns have the longest natural migration of any animal, and during their lives they may travel the equivalent distance of to the moon and back three times. What do Arctic terns symbolize in the novel, and why are Franny and Niall so drawn to them in particular?
4. The first time Franny sees Niall lecture, he quotes Margaret Atwood: "We ate the birds. We ate them. We wanted their songs to flow up through our throats and burst out of our mouths, and so we ate them. We wanted their feathers to bud from our flesh. We wanted their wings, we wanted to fly as they did, soar freely among the treetops and the clouds, and so we ate them. We speared them, we clubbed them, we tangled their feet in glue, we netted them, we spitted them, we threw them onto hot coals, and all for love, because we loved them. We wanted to be one with them." Why does he pick that passage? How do the themes of love and destruction echo throughout the novel?
5. What does Ireland represent for Franny? Australia? Discuss the importance of home and belonging in this novel, and how Franny's search for it shapes her life.
6. Franny says: "It isn't fair to be the kind of creature who is able to love but unable to stay." Why does she have so much trouble staying, even with the people she most loves? Did you find that aspect of her character sympathetic? Right before their car accident, Niall tells Franny, "There's a difference between wandering and leaving. In truth, you've never once left me." Do you agree?
7. Anik tells Franny: "The stronger you are, the more dangerous the world." What does he mean? Discuss this statement with regard to Franny and Ennis in particular.

8. Franny's conscience is split between protesting destructive fishing practices and depending on a fishing vessel to follow the terns. She and Niall devote much of their lives together to conservation, although their lifestyle sometimes runs counter to that effort (for instance, they still drive, fly, smoke, etc.). Did you sympathize with these contradictions?
9. At the Mass Extinction Reserve (MER) base, the conservationists prioritize saving animals that help humanity, such as pollinators, rather than, in Franny's words, "the animals that exist purely to exist, because millions of years of evolution have carved them into miraculous being." Is that prioritization selfish or justifiably practical? What do we lose in allowing the wild to disappear?
10. Niall and the other scientists at MER argue over the best way to protect birds. Niall believes that migration is inherent to their nature, while Harriet counters that they should learn to survive without migration, as a necessary adaptation. Whose argument do you find more convincing?
11. In one of his lectures, Niall says of wildlife: "They are being violently and indiscriminately slaughtered by our indifference. It has been decided by our leaders that economic growth is more important." How does that resonate in our world, as leaders debate the appropriate response to climate change? What is our responsibility to the planet?
12. Franny loves the sea "with every breath of me, every beat of me." What does the sea represent for her? Why is she so drawn to it?
13. Franny describes her life up until she decides to follow the terns as "a migration without a destination." Why do you think she spends so much of her life without ambition or direction? What are the positives and negatives of that sort of existence?
14. When Ennis tells Franny about his wife, Saoirse, asking him to leave so he won't see her Huntington's disease progress, Franny is adamant: "You have to go back to your family. You don't understand how important it is." Do you think Ennis was right to do what his wife asked? Is his inability to stay similar to Franny's?
15. Ennis tells Franny about Point Nemo, "the remotest place in the world, farther from land than anywhere else." When she asks what it's like, he replies, "There's nowhere crueler or lonelier. . . . It's quiet." Why are Ennis and Franny so drawn to Point Nemo? How does it resonate with the rest of the novel?
16. Franny believes "the fear world is worse than death. It is worse than anything." Do you agree? What is she afraid of?
17. Why does Franny take responsibility for the deaths of Niall and Greta? Do you think she is right to blame herself and plead guilty?
18. At a few key moments in the novel, including on the last page, Franny remembers her mother's advice: "Look for the clues to life, they're hidden everywhere." What does she mean? Discuss the role of fate vs. free will in these characters' lives.

19. What does Franny hope to accomplish by following the terns on their last migration? What about Ennis? What do you think the future holds for them?