

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Four Winds
by Kristin Hannah

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Kristin Hannah is the award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels including the international blockbuster, *The Nightingale*, which was named Goodreads Best Historical fiction novel for 2015 and won the coveted People's Choice award for best fiction in the same year. Additionally, it was a selection of the Reese Witherspoon Book Club in 2023. It was named a Best Book of the Year by Amazon, iTunes, BuzzFeed, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Paste*, and *The Week*. In 2018, *The Great Alone* became an instant *New York Times* #1 bestseller and was named the Best Historical Novel of the Year by Goodreads.

The Four Winds was published in February of 2021 and immediately hit #1 on the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and Indie bookstores' bestseller lists. Additionally, it was selected as a book club pick by the both Today Show and the Book Of the Month club, which named it the best book of 2021.

The Nightingale is currently in production at Tri Star, with Dakota and Elle Fanning set to star. Tri Star has also optioned *The Great Alone* and it is in development. *Firefly Lane*, her beloved novel about two best friends, was the #1 Netflix series around the world, in the week it came out. The popular tv show stars Katherine Heigl and Sarah Chalke and Season Two is currently set to conclude the series on April 27, 2023.

A former attorney, Kristin lives in the Pacific Northwest.

BOOK SUMMARY

Texas, 1921. A time of abundance. The Great War is over, the bounty of the land is plentiful, and America is on the brink of a new and optimistic era. But for Elsa Wolcott, deemed too old to marry in a time when marriage is a woman's only option, the future seems bleak. Until the night she meets Rafe Martinelli and decides to change the direction of her life. With her reputation in ruin, there is only one respectable choice: marriage to a man she barely knows.

By 1934, the world has changed; millions are out of work and drought has devastated the Great Plains. Farmers are fighting to keep their land and their livelihoods as crops fail and water dries up and the earth cracks open. Dust storms roll relentlessly across the plains. Everything on the Martinelli farm is dying, including Elsa's tenuous marriage; each day is a desperate battle against nature and a fight to keep her children alive.

In this uncertain and perilous time, Elsa—like so many of her neighbors—must make an agonizing choice: fight for the land she loves or leave it behind and go west, to California, in search of a better life for her family.

The Four Winds is a rich, sweeping novel that stunningly brings to life the Great Depression and the people who lived through it—the harsh realities that divided us as a nation and the enduring battle between the haves and the have-nots. A testament to hope, resilience, and the strength of the human spirit to survive adversity, *The Four Winds* is an indelible portrait of America and the American dream, as seen through the eyes of one indomitable woman whose courage and sacrifice will come to define a generation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “Don’t worry about dying, Elsa. Worry about not living. Be brave.” These words from Elsa’s Grandfather stuck with her throughout her life. Elsa never had high self esteem, so how did she show her bravery throughout her life?
2. “Elsa felt a deeply rooted shame in her daughter’s rejection. In her hurt, she did what she’d always done: she disappeared. But all the while, she waited, prayed, that both her husband and her daughter would someday see how much she loved them and they would love her in return. Until then, she dared not push too hard or demand too much.”
Elsa’s childhood taught her that she didn’t deserve much, training her to fade into the background in order to deal with rejection. How would her life and her relationships have been different if she’d asserted herself more? Would her relationship with Rafe have been different?
3. Do you think Elsa was heroic? What do you think you would’ve done if faced with her challenges?
4. “Jack says that I am a warrior and, while I don’t believe it, I know this: A warrior believes in an end she can’t see and fights for it. A warrior never gives up. A warrior fights for those weaker than herself. It sounds like motherhood to me.”
Motherhood changed Elsa completely. And she had experienced many different mothering types—her own mother’s coldness and rejections, Rose’s adoptive and enduring love, and her own fierce love for her children. How did these different experiences change Elsa, and influence her life’s path? What do these different experiences say about motherhood?
5. What do you think of Rafe’s decision to leave? Do you feel empathy for him, or think he was selfish? Do you think his children will ever see him again?
6. What do you think about the representation of communism in California? What brought the workers to that point, and would it have helped them?
7. Lorena came of age during a difficult time. How did she grow to embody aspects of both her mother and father?
8. “The four winds have blown us here, people from all across the country, to the very end of this great land. And now, at last, we make our stand, fight for what we know to be right. We fight for our American dream, that it will be possible again.”
Many characters in this book seek the American dream—from Rose and Tony, to Rafe, Elsa, Lorena, and many of the other farmers and workers. What does achieving the American dream mean to these characters? How do they view it differently? How do you view it?
9. The land features prominently in this book, ownership, hardship, and travel. How does the ownership of land affect the decisions of characters in this book? How does it play into discrimination?
10. The Great Depression was a greatly challenging time for nearly everyone in the United States. How do you think Americans would deal with these challenges if it happened now? How did the challenges of the COVID pandemic or the 2008 recession compare?

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