



FLATIRON  
BOOKS  
NEW YORK

# *Atalanta*

## Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Atalanta*. 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 *Atalanta*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. The epigraph states that the name *Atalanta* is derived from the Greek word meaning “equal in strength” (p. vii). Does *Atalanta* live up to her name? How are her strengths similar to the Argonaut men’s? How do her strengths differ?
2. The prologue details how *Atalanta* was abandoned by her parents at birth and raised by bears. How do the conditions of *Atalanta*’s upbringing ultimately affect the type of person she becomes? As a protégé of Artemis, she is expected to reflect some of the goddess’s glory and surpass other mortals. Do you think Artemis demands too much of *Atalanta*? How does she differ from other mortal women in the novel—Hypsipyle and Medea, for instance? What about the nymphs she grows up with?
3. Artemis requires that her nymphs, and eventually *Atalanta*, too, vow never to involve themselves with men. What do you think of this pact? How do *Atalanta*’s feelings about it change throughout the novel? Upon returning from her voyage, *Atalanta* is punished for not obeying this order. Do you agree with Artemis’s choice to banish her from her home with the nymphs? Or do you agree with *Atalanta* that it was unfair to send her on a voyage with men, expecting her to avoid them?
4. Thanks to her hunting skills and endurance, *Atalanta* is chosen as the only woman among the Argonauts. Artemis tells her: “You’re better already than any warrior out there. You’re greater than any man laying claim to the name of a hero. The world should know the name *Atalanta*. They should see what you can do” (p. 50). How do the Argonauts perceive *Atalanta* when she first joins the voyage? Does their perception of her change by the end of the voyage? Discuss.
5. The allure of the Golden Fleece is that it is impossible to obtain. What do the Argonauts hope to gain by taking it? Do they achieve their desired outcome? Compare the Golden Fleece to the Golden Apples. Do these objects lead characters closer to their goals, or are they distractions?
6. Discuss *Atalanta* and Meleager’s affair. Is their connection mutual? Compare Meleager’s and *Atalanta*’s views of the relationship. What do you think each of them gets out of it? How is it similar to and different from *Atalanta*’s relationship with Hippomenes?

7. In Colchis, Medea helps Jason and the Argonauts take the Golden Fleece, incurring her father's wrath. Safe on Artemis's island, Medea tells Jason: "I gave up everything for your quest. . . . I left a wealthy palace to flee on your ship, so that you could have the Fleece. Now it's yours and you can keep it; you can reap every reward while I lose everything I've ever had" (p. 190). What do you think Medea's motivations are for helping the Argonauts? In the end, who benefits more from her power: Jason or Medea?
8. As Atalanta prepares to return to Artemis and the nymphs, she wonders if she will be able to step back into the life she led before her voyage. In your reading, does Atalanta change over the course of the novel? If so, how?
9. Atalanta names her child Parthenopaios, after "the mountain I didn't leave him on" (p. 237), she explains. However, Atalanta doesn't plan on raising Parthenopaios. Instead, she finds parents to help her take care of him and plans to leave when he gets older. Compare Atalanta's decision to her parents' abandonment of her. Do you sympathize with Atalanta's decision?
10. When Hippomenes finds Atalanta in the woods, he reveals that she is not mentioned in any of the tales of the Argonauts' voyage. "What will they say in years to come?" he asks. "Will anyone remember you were there at all?" (p. 242). Why do you think Atalanta is left out of the Argonauts' narrative? What does this say about the way history is remembered and who gets to tell it?
11. Atalanta declares that she will never join someone else's expedition again. How do her expectations of the voyage compare with the actual experience? If Atalanta had truly known what she would face on her journey, do you think she would have still gone?
12. Upon reuniting with his daughter, Atalanta's father decrees that the man who beats Atalanta in a race will marry her, and those who lose will be killed. Though she can outrun every man, Atalanta decides to pull back and lose to Hippomenes. "What would my reputation be worth if I let my friend die? What kind of a hero would I be?" Atalanta asks. Hippomenes responds, "The usual kind" (p. 277). What does this say about Atalanta's character? How do her values compare to other heroes? Were you expecting her to lose the race?
13. Themes of home and belonging are prevalent in the novel. Where is home for Atalanta? Is there a specific place (literal or figurative) where you think Atalanta belongs the most?
14. Atalanta declares that she is more herself and free with Hippomenes. Do you agree? What do you think of Atalanta's transformation into a lioness and her reconciliation with Artemis? Would you consider *Atalanta* to have a happy ending? Why or why not?