



FLATIRON  
BOOKS  
NEW YORK

# *Guardians of the Trees*

## Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Guardians of the Trees*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to occasionally reveal spoilers. If you have not finished reading *Guardians of the Trees*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. What does this memoir's title, *Guardians of the Trees*, mean to you? Did the book change how you think about trees and rainforests?
2. The memoir begins with a moment from Kinari's childhood, when she and her horse, Pinto, narrowly escape falling off a mesa. What tone does this story set for the rest of the book to come?
3. Kinari nearly dies the evening she is stung by a box jellyfish. At her clinic, as she fights for her life, she tells us she is unafraid of death. Why does she feel that way? How do her experiences in Indonesia and her relationship with her Indonesian patients and colleagues change how she thinks about death and dying?
4. As a doctor and later as a patient, Kinari is able to see firsthand the differences between Western medicine and more traditional practices. Discuss the ways in which her experiences in the United States shape the way she provides health care in Indonesia. What are the problems she identifies with Western medicine?
5. Growing up in New Mexico, Kinari had a great deal of freedom but also faced numerous challenges, including sexual abuse and trauma. How does her childhood shape the person she becomes, in both positive and negative ways?
6. Discuss the Indonesian phrase "*Tak kenal, tak sayang*" (If you don't know something, you can't love it). How does that quote help explain Kinari's relationship with the rainforest and with her work more generally? What does it mean to you? Do you agree?
7. As a college student studying orangutans in Gunung Palung, Kinari describes the rainforest as "a giant curved mirror, reflecting back one's emotions, magnified and distorted: one moment joy and the next fear." What do you think she means? What does she have to confront in the forest, and how does that experience change her forever?
8. What is the Blackfoot First Nation's hierarchy of needs? How does it help shape Kinari's thinking about community, health care, and the environment?

9. How does chaos theory, known as the butterfly effect, inform Kinari's approach to her own work? How might the lives of individuals affect global climate change?
10. Although she is raised as an atheist, Kinari has a powerful spiritual awakening in the rainforest at Gunung Palung, which makes her completely rethink her relationship to faith. She describes suddenly feeling "awake as I had never been before." What do you think leads her to this profound moment? What roles do faith and spirituality play in the rest of her memoir?
11. Central to Kinari's work is the idea of interconnectedness, that "harm to one, including to the environment, is harm to all." How does this memoir help explain that view? Did you find your own understanding of our interdependence shifting as you read?
12. What is "radical listening"? How does it shape the work of ASRI and Health In Harmony? How does it contrast with the approach of traditional NGOs, at least as Kinari experiences it while helping with the emergency response after the hurricane?
13. What factors contribute to Hotlin's feelings of anger and frustration toward Kinari and her role at ASRI? What specific obstacles does she face as a woman of color? How do she and Kinari rethink the leadership structure of ASRI to help address these issues?
14. Kinari argues that we as humans often struggle to accept "how radically things can change; as soon as one problem is solved, we focus on the next." Do you agree? How might such thinking hold us back, and what alternative does Kinari model?
15. Near the end of the memoir, Kinari reflects that perhaps "both planting and fire were necessary. . . . Sometimes loss makes room for new ideas, new lessons, and new life—despite the painful sadness." How does this play out both in her work and her personal life, especially in her marriage to Cam? Do you agree with her?
16. How does Kinari's prophetic dream lead her to rethink the scope of her work and turn her attention toward the global climate crisis?
17. Discuss the Declaration of Interbeing at the end of the book. How can individuals create meaningful change when it comes to global warming? What are some concrete ways you might alter your lifestyle after reading this memoir? Did you find it ultimately hopeful?