



Asa James Discussion Guide

1. Scars, both visible and invisible, recur throughout the novel. How do Asa's physical scars impact him differently from Caro's emotional wounds?
2. There are echoes of *Jane Eyre* in Asa's journey. If you know that novel, how did the Vermont setting and the reversed genders reshape the themes of that classic novel for you?
3. Asa dreams of becoming a naturalist in the mold of Darwin. How does his scientific curiosity shape the way he observes people, including Caro and the two boys in his care?
4. Caro is glossy and sardonic on the surface, but something of a "broken woman" underneath. What does Asa see in her that others might miss? And what does she see in him?
5. Besides Asa and Caro, which other characters in the novel are able to see "under the surface"? Which characters can see only outer appearances?
6. The shameful secret hidden within Mansfield Hall forces Asa into a terrible choice. Did you agree with what he chose? Would you have chosen differently?
7. Asa is unable to forgive his adoptive parents throughout most of the book. What makes him rigidly unforgiving? And what changes him?
8. The novel defines and then redefines "morality" in relation to "respectability". How do different characters view morality in varying ways? How do their views change?