

Further Reading

The Dirty Life: On Farming, Food, and Love
Kristin Kimball (2010)
FARMING KIM

After interviewing Mark, a dynamic young farmer, 30-something Harvard-graduate, Kristin Kimball goes from being an unmarried journalist in Manhattan to a farming partner in the Adirondacks. The two fall in love and embark on a huge adventure: creating a sustainable farm on a co-op model using draft horses instead of tractors.

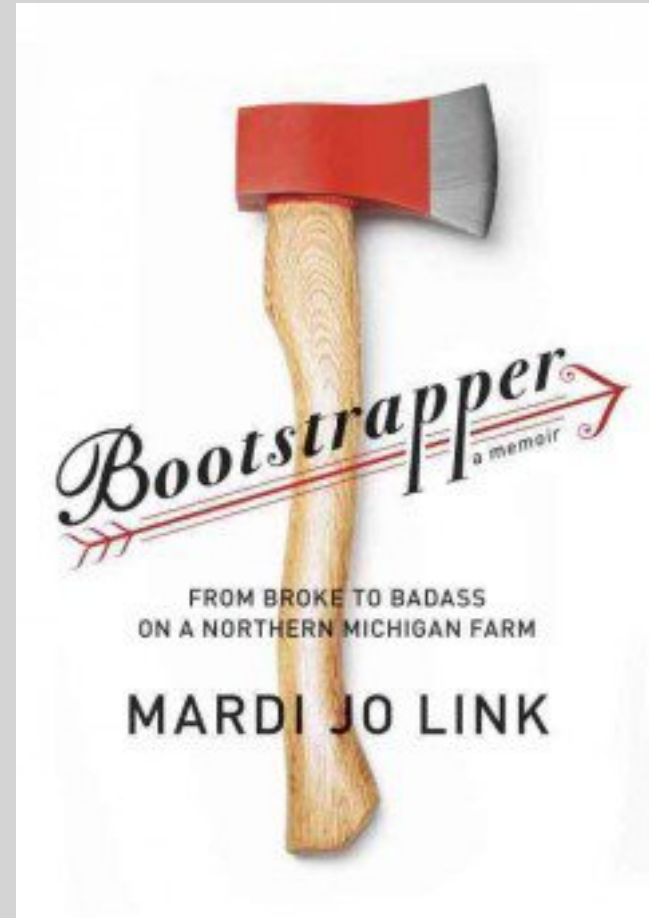
Born With Teeth
Kate Mulgrew (2015)
INSPIR THOMAS

A star known for her strong female roles in *Star Trek: Voyager* and *Orange Is the New Black* offers a deeply moving account of the price and rewards of a passionate life.

Coop: A Year of Poultry, Pigs, and Parenting
Michael Perry (2009)
FARMING PERRY

In over his head with two pigs, a dozen chickens, and a baby due any minute, Perry gives us a humorous, heartfelt memoir of a new life in the country.

Book Discussion Guide



About the Book

It's the summer of 2005 and Mardi Jo Link's dream of living the simple life has unraveled into debt, heartbreak, and perpetually ragged cuticles. Still, when she and her husband call it quits, leaving her more broke than ever, Link makes a seemingly impossible resolution: to hang on to her northern Michigan farm and continue to raise her boys on well water and wood chopping and dirt. Armed with an unfailing sense of humor and her three resolute accomplices, Link confronts blizzards and coyotes, learns about Zen divorce and the best way to butcher a hog, dominates a zucchini-growing contest and wins a year's supply of local bread, masters the art of bargain cooking, deals with rampaging poultry, and finds her way to a truly rich existence.

Discussion Questions

1. In the first chapter, a thief snatches tickets out of Link's son's hand. What realization does she come to at the conclusion of this event and their time at the Cherry Festival? How does Link develop this idea as a motif throughout the book? Where does this concept reappear within her story?
2. Why is Link so affected by the death of her horse Major? What does his death represent for her? Does her stance on this or her interpretation of this event seem to change or evolve at all by the end of the book?
3. Evaluate the structure of the book and consider the chapter titles Link has chosen. What period of time is represented in each chapter and in the book as a whole? Why is it significant that the chapters and their titles reference the cycles of the moon, the passage of time, and the changing of the seasons? What do these items say about change as an inherent part of our human experience?
4. How do faith and spirituality surface as key aspects of the book? Link seems to be on a journey to discover her faith and come to an understanding of what she does and does not believe. Raised as a Lutheran, she brings her sons from church to church. Where does she end up in this spiritual journey by the book's end? In what does she ultimately find faith, a sense of spirituality, and consolation?
5. Is there a traditional villain (or villains) in this book? If so, who are they? Besides people, what other items or concepts represented in the book become symbols of villainy?
6. Evaluate point of view in the book. Though the story is told by Link, how do her sons and other characters provide some variety in point of view? What is the effect of this? Why is it important that Link's voice does not overrun the book?
7. Link says that if there was a single mantra in her childhood, it was "accountability." What does she mean by this? Does Link ever ask for help or assistance? Why or why not?
8. How does Link change from the start of the story to its conclusion? How do we find her in the first chapter? How about the last?
9. Though Link's book is a work of nonfiction, she is not unlike many characters in world literature. How does Link's character compare to other protagonists or heroines in literature? What do they share in common? What sets her apart? Consider her role as wife, mother, farmer, woman, head of household, etc.
10. At the conclusion of the book, what is it that Link sees as her greatest victory? Do you agree?

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