

## Further Reading

**If You Leave Me**  
**Crystal Hana Kim (2018)**  
**KIM**

AFORCED into the life of a refugee when the North Korean army invades her home, 16-year-old Haemi is forced to choose between love and security in ways that resonate throughout generations of her family.

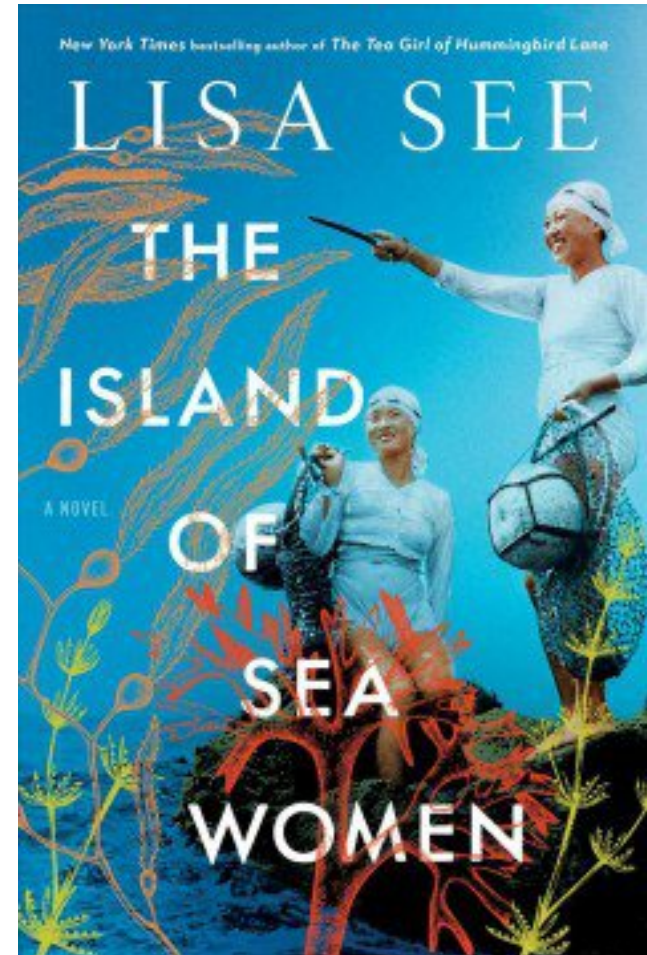
**White Chrysanthemum**  
**Mary Lynn Bracht (2018)**  
**BRACHT**

A SWEEPING historical debut for fans of Lilac Girls, Memoirs of a Geisha, and Kristin Hannah that brings to life the heartbreaking history of Korea through the deeply moving and redemptive story of two sisters separated by World War II.

**The Atomic City Girls**  
**Janet Beard (2018)**  
**BEARD**

IN NOVEMBER 1944, 18-year-old June Walker boards an unmarked bus, destined for a city that doesn't officially exist- a town of trailers and segregated houses, 24-hour cafeterias, and constant security checks. There, June joins hundreds of other girls operating massive machines whose purpose is never explained. They know they are helping to win the war, but must ask no questions and reveal nothing to outsiders.

## Book Discussion Guide



## About the Book

Mi-ja and Young-sook, two girls living on the Korean island of Jeju, are best friends that come from very different backgrounds. When they are old enough, they begin working in the sea with their village's all-female diving collective, led by Young-sook's mother. As the girls take up their positions as baby divers, they know they are beginning a life of excitement and responsibility but also danger. Despite their love for each other, Mi-ja and Young-sook's differences are impossible to ignore. The novel covers many decades, beginning during a period of Japanese colonialism in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by World War II, the Korean War and its aftermath, through the era of cell phones and wet suits for the women divers.

## Discussion Questions

1. The story begins with Young-sook as an old woman, gathering algae on the beach. What secrets or clues about the past and the present are revealed in the scenes that take place in 2008? Why do we only understand the beginning of the novel only after we have finished it?
2. When Young-sook and Mi-ja are fifteen, Young-sook's mother says to them: "You are like sisters, and I expect you to take care of each other today and every day as those tied by blood would do" (p. 13). How are these words of warning? Discuss the ways in which female relationships are depicted and the important role they play on Jeju.
3. On page 17, Young-sook's mother recites a traditional haenyeo aphorism: Every woman who enters the sea carries a coffin on her back (p. 22). Then, on page 71, Grandmother says, "The ocean is better than your natal mother. The sea is forever." How do these contradictory ideas play out in the novel? What do they say about the dangerous work of the haenyeo?
4. In many ways, the novel is about blame, guilt, and forgiveness. In the first full chapter, Yu-ri has her encounter with the octopus. What effect does this incident have on various characters moving forward: Mother, Young-sook, Mi-ja, Do-saeng, Gu-ja, Gu-sun, and Jun-bu? Young-sook is also involved in the tragic death of her mother. To what extent is she responsible for these sad events? Is her sense of guilt justified?
5. What is the significance of the octopus? How does it relate to the other elements of the story?
6. How does the octopus incident affect the relationship between Mi-ja and Young-sook?
7. The haenyeo are respected for having a matrifocal culture—a society focused on women. They work hard, have many responsibilities and freedoms, and earn money for their households, but how much independence and power within their families and their cultures do they really have? Are there examples from the story that illustrate the independence of women but also their subservience?
8. What is life like for men married to haenyeo? Compare Young-sook's father, Mi-ja's husband, and Young-sook's husband.
9. How does the relationship between Mi-ja and Young-sook change over time?
10. What practical applications did Shamanism have for the haenyeo? Do the traditions and rituals help the haenyeo conquer the fears and anxieties they have about their dangerous work? Does Young-sook ever question her beliefs, and why?
11. How does the relationship between Mi-ja and Young-sook change over time?
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13. The aphorism "Deep roots remain tangled underground," is used to describe Young-sook's and Mi-ja's friendship, and it becomes especially true when it's revealed that their children, Joon-lee and Yo-chan, are getting married. How else does this aphorism manifest itself on Jeju, especially in the context of the islanders' suffering and shared trauma? Do you think it's true that we cannot remove ourselves from the connections of our pasts?
14. How does the relationship between Mi-ja and Young-sook change over time?
15. The characters have lived through Japanese colonialism, the Sino-Japanese War, World War II, the Korean War, the 4.3 Incident, and the Vietnam War. How do these larger historic events affect the characters and island life?
16. Mi-ja's rubbings are critical to the novel. How do they illustrate the friendship between Mi-ja and Young-sook? How do they help Young-sook in her process of healing?

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