As the story opens, Whitney finds herself facing the death of her dream. Have you ever experienced the loss of something you desperately wanted? How did the experience change you? Do you believe the disappointments in our lives happen for a reason? What can we learn from adverse circumstances or unfair treatment?

Whitney has spent her adult life traveling around, never forming close associations with people. Why do you think she has chosen this? Are you one to get involved or to keep your distance?

On Roanoke Island, Whitney is confronted with memories she isn’t prepared for. Have you ever returned to a childhood place and experienced memories you didn’t realize you had? Is there a place that harbors the ancestral history of your family?

Whitney is surprised to learn more about her mother’s relationship with Clyde. Why do you think her mother never told her the truth? Have you ever uncovered a secret that rewrote family history? Were you better off knowing or not knowing?

In Alice’s letters, Whitney discovers the broken sister-bond between Ziltha and Alice. Why do you think Ziltha destroyed the letters? Was this a justified response? How do you think the young Ziltha was different from the woman Whitney knew?

Alice seems to view her new position with the Federal Writers’ Project as an opportunity to break the cycle of grief that has held her prisoner. Have you ever found yourself trapped in one place in life, seeming to go nowhere? How did you break out?

In her journey, Alice visits people she would never have spent time with, had her life not taken an unexpected turn. Has a change of circumstances ever thrown you into unexpected company? How did you react? Do you think Alice reacts well to the people she meets? Is she naive, or hopeful, or both?

Why does Whitney have such a difficult time trusting Mark and forming close friendships? How do our pasts dictate our futures? Do we always judge new people in light of past wounds? Do you think we’re doomed to act based on past wounds, or can we be made new? How?

Alice is confronted with cruelty and prejudice in the mountains. Have you experienced these things? Are we called to act, even if the injustice doesn’t directly affect us? In what ways?

Have you ever spent time with someone who lived through the Great Depression? Did their morals, values, and habits differ from your own? What can we learn from those who have suffered through sparse times?

Whitney sets out with one goal in mind—to get what she thinks she needs—but in the end, she discovers that happiness lies in a completely different direction. Has life ever surprised you in a similar way?

Do you know your family stories? What’s one of your favorites, or the one that most defines you? How did you learn it? What’s your favorite way to share stories with the next generation?