

Fremont Great Books Book Club
Discussion Questions for “The Song of the Lark” by Willa Cather
May 24, 2025

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book begins in the 1880s and investigates many friendships Thea has with older men in and around Moonstone, CO (Dr. Archie, Professor Wunsch, Spanish Johnny, and Ray Kennedy). How did these relationships shape Thea’s view of herself and her development? Did you think any of the relationships were inappropriate even if we adjust our lens to over 130 years ago?
2. About halfway through the book, Thea realizes that all of the people with whom she has the strongest ties seems to have a second self, one particularly sensitive to music. What does Thea determine to make of her life after this realization? Did you believe at that point she would succeed or fail?
3. The painting, *The Song of the Lark*, is still on display at the Art Institute of Chicago. The painting depicts a young woman taking a break from working in a farm field as a sunset behind her. Thea considers the painting “hers” and relates strongly to it, revisiting the painting often. What is your opinion about the similarities or differences between the painting and Thea? Was the book’s title well-chosen?
4. Trains appear frequently in the action of the novel. Ray Kennedy, for example, is killed after a train accident. And it is during Thea’s first train trip to Chicago that she recognizes the talent wrestling within her. What is why did Cather choose trains as a fulcrum?
5. Would Thea have embarked on an artistic career if Ray Kennedy had not bequeathed her a head start?
6. The novel is broken up into six parts. Did you feel that the structure affected your reading experience?
7. The novel provides a direct look at Americans a generation or two removed from immigrating (the Kronbergs) and those who are recent immigrants (the Mexican people living near Moonstone). What is Cather’s view of immigrants and their affect on the US?
8. How do the settings of the novel (the desert plains of Colorado, major cities like Chicago and New York in America and Germany) mirror Thea’s life? Do you think Cather makes these settings a character?
9. Compare the Thea shown to us in the first two parts of the book to the cynical and cruel Thea in the 3rd part. What caused Thea to lose her kind and caring ways? What breaks her out of her world-weary mode? Next, compare the Theas shown to us in the first 3 parts to the Thea we meet in the last three parts. In what ways has she changed, and in what ways has she remained the same? Do you think, as some readers do, that Thea is indulgent and self-centered?
10. Why is romance so difficult for Thea and does the narrator have an opinion about Thea’s romantic choices? What price is paid for Thea’s success? Does Thea nurse any regrets?
11. Were you surprised at Cather’s presentation of a character who operated outside the typical gender roles of her day?

RESOURCES & LINKS

Art Institute of Chicago information about the painting, *The Song of the Lark*, by Jules Breton:

<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/94841/the-song-of-the-lark>

<https://www.supersummary.com/the-song-of-the-lark/summary/>

<https://www.willacather.org/media/1466/download?inline>

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/296513/the-song-of-the-lark-by-willa-cather/9780141181042/readers-guide/>

Words new to me: troche (lozenge/pastille), calaboose (jail), scantling (narrow timber in roof rafters), potsherd (shards of pottery, esp. of archeological value)