

The Moon Sisters
by Therese Walsh
Reading Group Guide

1. Early in the story, Babka told her granddaughter, Olivia Moon, “Dreams like feet, better than knees,” which helped set Olivia and Jazz’s journey in motion. What did she mean by that? Do all of the characters embrace this idea, or do some resist it?

2. Consider Branik’s belief that there are always two ways to look at things. When were characters made to see things in a different light? Were you, as a reader, ever surprised to find your perspective on something changing as you read, be it a character or situation? What prompted your shift?

3. Olivia’s blindness is self-inflicted. Why do you think she stared at the sun? Has Jazz limited herself in other ways? How? Do you believe that narrowing life choices is a form of self-defense?

4. What do Beth’s letters represent throughout the story? Why do you think Beth never sent them? Why do you think Jazz and Olivia similarly hid her letters from each other and the outside world? What would it have meant to let them go?

5. What do Hobbs’ coins represent? Can you draw a comparison between the letters and the coins?

6. Babka always said that the secret to life could be found in a bag of marbles. What do you think she meant by that? Do you agree? Does anyone in your family have a secret to life?

7. Some, including Olivia, might say Jazz has an obsession with death. Why do you think Jazz has a collection of obituaries in her backpack? Why does she want to work at a funeral home? Does she want to find something there, or let go of something? What is she grappling with?

8. It’s said that we unwittingly become our parents, and that our parents often coerce us into fulfilling their unrealized ambitions. Do you feel Olivia has adopted any of Beth’s old ambitions? What about Jazz? Does this make sense with Beth’s assertion that Olivia is her “old-mirror daughter,” while Jazz is a “new mirror”? Do you see “versions of self” in your family?

9. Consider the idea of atonement. Jazz felt Beth lived most of her adult life seeking atonement for the behavior that led to an estrangement from her father. Did Jazz live her life similarly? How? Is atonement a possible motivation for any of Olivia's actions throughout the story?
10. "All of the best living happens on the edges." What do you think Hobbs means by this? Do you agree with him?
11. While walking past the Mill Point Federal Prison, which had been an open prison, Hobbs tells Jazz that "prison is a state of mind." Why do you think this statement stays with her for as long as it does? How is the idea relevant to her life?
12. What do the will-o'-the-wisp lights represent to Beth? What do they represent to Olivia? Is this the same or different?
13. It's thought that will-o'-the-wisp lights, or "foolish fires," are never attainable. What do you think? What "foolish fires" are in your own life? Do you pursue them, or watch them from afar?
14. Do you believe that Olivia succeeds in finding the lights in the end, or not?
15. How are both Olivia and Jazz altered by their journey? What do you think each of them will take away from their time together that could help them throughout the rest of their lives?
16. Olivia said that hope, to her, tasted like "a mix of berries, just a hair shy of ripe, with a drizzle of honey and another drizzle of lemon, and coffee with cream, and ice water when you hold it in your mouth until the ice melts. With a dash of salt. And maybe some mint." If "hope" had a taste for you, what would it taste like? What would it look like? What would it sound like? Would you fight to preserve it? How far would you go in the name of hope?
17. What do you think happened to Beth? What are your thoughts on her last letter—what it said, and what became of it?