

Discussion Questions for  
*Girl With Skirt of Stars* by Jennifer Kitchell

Lilli expresses the Navajo belief that there is good in all things, and the potential for evil in all of us as well. Do you agree with this interpretation?

Lilli mentions how Jerome would be forgiven by the Navajo for committing the murder of Bilgehe, but that he would most obviously not be forgiven by an American court. What are the differences between Navajo and American systems of justice?

An interesting addition would be to research the Navajo Peacemaker Court which is studied in some American law programs as an enlightened system of justice. What does the story show is the difference between retribution and redemption?

'Memory' and how it shifts over time are very important throughout the book – from Duane's memories of his mother, to Lilli's childhood memories of Jerome. Can we trust their memories? What is the significance of memory?

In its many guises, love plays a large role in this story. Discuss the various ways in which love—for a river, a culture, for a woman or man, between a mother and her son—propels our experiences and choices in life.

Lilli says that being *born* Navajo isn't the same as *being* Navajo and that "being Navajo is a state of mind." What does it take to *be* Navajo and is Jerome Navajo at the end of the book?

Lilli and Jerome differently react to and read the worlds they live in: she with words, he with visual images. Both are message carriers. In what way did they help the other to "see" what they didn't know was there?

Lilli is caught by surprise by Jerome's reappearance in her life. What is your reaction to Lilli's intense connection to Jerome after all of those years have passed? How might we understand the draw between these two? Do you agree with Lilli's choices to protect Jerome throughout the book?

Why do you think the book is titled *Girl with Skirt of Stars*?

From which character did you learn the most, and why? In what important ways is the river itself a character? How did the author's description of landscape add to your experience of entering another world?

This is a story of multiple mysteries as well as a story of collision: between politics, personalities, and very different histories. Did you feel that reading the novel helped you better understand the complexity of historical as well as inevitable present-day collisions between these two 'American' cultures?

Lee and Lilli both have strong views about building a new dam in the Canyon. Whose view do you think would win in today's political landscape?

What did you think of the complexities of Asan's healing ceremony, and the concept that healing can be accomplished in this way involving group support and a retelling of the narrative of what went wrong?

The book is filled with imagery symbolizing male and female. Did the Navajo view help you better understand gender roles and sexual tension?

Discuss the ways in which Lilli functioned as both an insider and an outsider. Did you find it helpful to have Lilli navigate for you, as reader, through our shared familiar territory as well as the unfamiliar territory of Navajo thinking?

Duane's planned assassination is linked to pleasing his mother. Based on what we learn about her through his thoughts, why do you think she has this constant influence over him? Where do you think she is, throughout the story?

Duane carries a historical document detailing the Mountain Meadow Massacre, introducing a non-fictional element into this story. John D. Lee was involved in the massacre but still has public sites named after him. Do you feel this is justifiable, or do you think the names should be changed?

Did you feel that not knowing for certain whether Duane encountered the American justice system at the book's end helped you think beyond that plot question to even more important questions about justice?