



**Georgetown Township Public Library
Book Discussion Guide**

Caleb's Crossing
Geraldine Brooks (2011)

About This Book

Bethia Mayfield is a restless and curious young woman growing up in Martha's Vineyard in the 1660s amid a small band of pioneering English Puritans. At age twelve, she meets Caleb, the young son of a chieftain, and the two forge a secret bond that draws each into the alien world of the other. Bethia's father is a Calvinist minister who seeks to convert the native Wampanoag, and Caleb becomes a prize in the contest between old ways and new, eventually becoming the first Native American graduate of Harvard College. Inspired by a true story and narrated by the irresistible Bethia, ***Caleb's Crossing*** brilliantly captures the triumphs and turmoil of two brave, openhearted spirits who risk everything in a search for knowledge at a time of superstition and ignorance.

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About the Author

Geraldine Brooks is the author of three novels, the Pulitzer Prize-winning ***March*** and the international bestsellers ***People of the Book*** and ***Year of Wonders***. She has also written the acclaimed nonfiction works ***Nine Parts of Desire*** and ***Foreign Correspondence***. Born and raised in Australia, she lives on Martha's Vineyard with her husband, Tony Horwitz, and their two sons.

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Discussion Questions

1. In discussing the purchase of the island from the Wampanoag, Bethia's father says, "some now say that [the sonquem] did not fully understand that we meant to keep the land from them forever. Be that as it may, what's done is done and it was done lawfully" (p. 9). Do you agree with his opinion?
2. With that in mind, examine Caleb's view of the settlers on p. 143 – 144. Why does he say that the sound of their "boots, boots, and more boots" (p. 143) moved him to cross cultures and adopt Christianity? Contrast this with Tequamuck's reaction to the settlers' arrival (p. 295). Placed in their situation, what would you have felt?
3. Look at Bethia's discussion of the question "Who are we?" at the top of p. 57. Of the options that she offers, which seems most true to you? Are there other options you would add to her list?
4. On p. 285, Joseph Dudley discusses the philosophical question of the Golden Mean, which suggests that the ideal behavior is the middle point between extremes. But he then goes on to argue against this belief, stating that, in fact, there is no middle point between extremes such as "good and evil, truth and falsehood." Which perspective do you agree with?
5. Compared with those in her community, Bethia is remarkably unprejudiced in her view of the Wampanoag. Did you grow up surrounded by prejudices you disagreed with? How did this affect you? Conversely, did you have prejudices in your youth that you've since overcome?
6. Bethia sees her mother's silence as a great strength and tool in dealing with society, particularly as a woman in a male-dominated culture. However, while Bethia repeatedly tries to emulate this behavior, she's often overcome by her own passionate opinions. Find an example where Bethia's boldness in stating her mind is a good thing, and an example where it brings her trouble. Have you ever wished you had spoken when instead you stayed quiet—or wished you had stayed quiet instead of having spoken your mind?
7. The Wampanoag and the Puritans have very different views on raising children. Describe the differences you see between the two and which method you believe is healthier. Are Caleb and Bethia the typical product of their respective societies?
8. Bethia acknowledges that her own religion could seem as crazy to Caleb as his does to her: "Of course, I thought it all outlandish. But... it came to me that our story of a burning bush and a parted sea might also seem fabulous, to one not raised up knowing it was true" (p. 35). In the end, Caleb does come to accept Bethia's religion, and she develops a kinder attitude toward him. Have you or anyone you know ever converted religions? Have you grown interested in or accepting of religions or practices that initially struck you as strange or foreign?

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9. When visiting Italy, Bethia writes of feeling overwhelmed by how different it was from her own home. Have you ever had a similar experience when traveling somewhere new? Did your travels make you see your own home in a new light? Does Bethia's visit to Italy change her beliefs or behavior?

10. Unlike Bethia, her son has no interest in traveling to older countries like Italy, saying that "everything there is done and built and finished. I like it here, where we can make and do for ourselves" (p. 274). Is this sense of independence and potential still true of the United States today?

11. Both Bethia and Caleb struggle against the limits and expectations placed on them by society. How are their experiences similar? How are they different? Who faces the greater challenge?

<http://www.litlovers.com>

Resources for additional information about book discussion choices and authors:

Books & Authors (Access through links to MeL Databases on Library's webpage.)
<http://bna.galegroup.com/bna/>

LitLovers.com
www.litlovers.com

Overbooked.com
<http://www.overbooked.com>

Penguin.com (USA)
<http://www.us.penguin.com/static/pages/bookclubs/index.html>

Reading Group Center
<http://reading-group-center.knopfdoubleday.com>

Reading Group Guides
<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>

Suggested print resources:

The Book Club Companion: A Comprehensive Guide to the Reading Group Experience
Diana Loevy
374.22 Loevy 2006

The Book Group Book: A Thoughtful Guide to Forming and Enjoying a Stimulating Book Discussion Group
Ellen Slezak (editor)
374.22 Book 2000

Good Books Lately: The One-Stop Resource for Book Groups and Other Greedy Readers
Ellen Moore and Kira Stevens
374.22 Moore 2004

Read It and Eat: A Month-by-Month Guide to Scintillating Book Club Selections and Mouthwatering Menus
Sarah Gardner
028.9 Gardner 2005

The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know, From Choosing Members to Leading Discussions
Rachel W. Jacobsohn
374.22 Jacobsohn 1994

What Do I Read Next? (Multi-volume set, annual editions)
Gale Research Inc.
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