

READING GROUP GUIDE

The Door to January
Written by Gillian French
Hardcover, 200 pages, Young Adult Fiction, Ages 13+
ISBN: 978-1-944762-10-0

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Which character in *The Door to January* would you most like to interview? What would you ask him/her? Think of five questions you'd want to ask Natalie. Think of five questions you'd want to ask Lowell. What question could you ask that both Natalie and Lowell would answer differently? Natalie and Lowell have different stories of an event. How do stories change when different people tell them? What stories in current events are told differently from different players?

What aspects of Natalie and Teddy's bullying scene were portrayed in a realistic way? What, if anything, was unrealistic? Have you ever been part of or witnessed any similar incident? Why do people act in unkind ways? What clues does the author offer to support your ideas? What do you think can be done to prevent bullying incidents?

Teddy reads *My Brother Sam is Dead* to escape from the stress of his daily life. That is a novel about a family split apart by the American Revolution. Why do you think the author chose this particular title for Teddy? What book do you turn to read over and over again? Why is that your go-to book?

Natalie is pulled back in time against her will. If you could travel through time by choice, what time period would you most like to visit? When would it be okay to change the past? How would your gender, sexuality, or cultural identity limit or expand your possibilities for time travel?

The Door to January explores the power of a place. Natalie feels a connection to the farmhouse. To what place do you have a strong connection and why? How do you think places can hold memories that live on through time? What evidence do you have for the existence of ghosts?

Cilla says, ". . . [I]t's crazy the way things turn out. Kids you've known since they were babies can grow to be so lost..." (p.137). Think of a friend you've had for a long time. How have they changed? How have you changed? Could you have predicted any of those changes? Why or why not?

Lace curtains, keys, a kettle, dirty dishes, a moon-faced clock, a lantern—how does the author use regular objects to add emotion and tension to her scenes?

If *The Door to January* was made into a movie, who would you cast in the major roles?

ACTIVITIES

Arts and crafts: Make a bookmark

Choose your favorite quote, phrase, or even single words from the book. Are there any sentences that stayed with you as you read the book? Any quotes you loved? Choose words you like and make these big and bold on one side of your bookmarks (you can use our template, attached). Alternately, use an online word cloud generator (a few examples: wordclouds.com, tagxedo.com, wordle.net) to make a word picture for your bookmark.

Creative writing: Extend the end

In French's original manuscript, the ending of the book was different. Would you change the ending, if you could? Instead of having an epilogue, written from the point of view of the new owners of the house, write a different epilogue from a different character's point of view.

Creative writing: Make a dream journal

Dreams and nightmares figure heavily in *The Door to January*. Do any scenes, settings, or characters appear over and over again in your dreams? Keep a dream journal for a week and see if that changes the way you remember your dreams. To make a dream journal, you can make a collage on the cover of a dollar store notebook, or make your own with folded 8.5" x 11" paper, a cereal box cover, and a needle and thread.

Get inspired: <http://www.cremedelacraft.com/2012/06/diy-mini-notebook-from-cereal-box.html>

TAKE IT FURTHER

Animation: Make a book trailer

Check out book trailers online and make some notes about the ones you like the most. Find out what images you can use that are in the "creative commons" (available for public use) or take your own photos. Narrate a voice-over or use quotes from the book.

Get inspired: Two teenagers in Yarmouth, Maine, made a book trailer for *The Door to January*.

Watch it here: https://youtu.be/m9-W_sAwQFQ

Creative writing: Find story prompts through library research

Many writers get their ideas from real life. Plots for mysteries can spring right from the headlines. In *The Door to January*, Gillian French has her characters do research at a library. Natalie and Teddy search in old newspapers to see if there are news stories about missing girls. See what your library has for old newspapers. Find the oldest newspaper there, or see if you can find a newspaper from the month/year of your birth. Choose a headline and write a short, fictionalized story to go with it.

Oral argument: Stage a debate

In the book, the presence of a gun elevates the bullying to a criminal act. We see guns depicted in books, television, online, and in gaming situations. Some families have guns in their homes. Choose to defend or oppose the following statement in a debate: Common sense gun control would make Americans safer. For an extra challenge, try taking the side in which you don't initially believe.

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