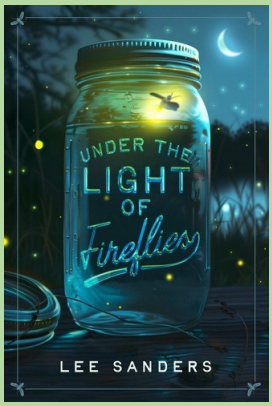

UNDER THE LIGHT OF FIREFLIES

A NOVEL BY LEE SANDERS

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STUDY GUIDE

1. Does economic class play a role in the novel? For example, we are told, "The son of a rich attorney, Tyler was a pretty boy with a beautiful sweeping coiffure whose parents arrayed him in fancy shirts with logos. He was the squirrelly kind who always got away with things like cutting in the lunch line or skipping school."
2. How does Noah's relationship with Jill grow and change throughout the novel? What does Jill teach him about loyalty and friendship?
3. How does Noah's relationship with Jaime, with whom he shares a first kiss, grow and change? What does Noah learn about judgment, perceptions of others, and himself because of his interactions with her.
4. In the novel, the details of Noah's run-in with the tiger is kept from him by his family and the townspeople for a long time. Do you think this was the right way to handle it? How does Noah feel being left in the dark?
5. Why is it so important to Noah to find out exactly what happened to his father?
6. What does the novel have to say about bullies and dealing with them?
7. What does the novel have to say about fitting in or belonging?
8. What roles do memory and forgetting play in the novel?
9. In what way is Noah's older brother like a typical older brother? In what way does he play a "father role" in Noah's life? How does Noah feel about his little sister? Does he play a fatherly or brotherly role with his little sister? Why?
10. What are the inner conflicts that Noah faces? What are the outer conflicts? Which are more important for his coming-of-age during the course of the novel or do they interact seamlessly?
11. What pressures does Noah face? How do these pressures create him into the person he becomes by the end of the novel?
12. What's more important in this novel--character development or plot? Why?
13. If you are a writer, how would you characterize Sanders' choice of dilemmas for his protagonist's path?
14. Do you think Noah's conflicts are as important to developing the plot as the "villains'" conflict (i.e., the bullies who plague Noah throughout the novel)?
15. This novel takes place in 1981 in the south. Noah, a white kid, is friends with a black youth from his school and on his baseball team. He also encounters two African-American adults at pivotal moments in his story. What do you know about relationships between African-Americans and whites in East Texas in the 1980s? What positive contributions do these characters provide for Noah's growth and development? Would the story be the same without their engagement? Why or why not?
16. Noah is prejudiced against Henry the Russian zookeeper. Why? As a reader, how do you unpack the relevance of Noah's perceived prejudice against Henry vs. Henry's actual innocence and his actions towards Noah? How does this perception change?
17. In Chapter 15 when Noah is allowed to see Henry's letter and heirloom, he learns that Henry planned to accept his verdict, be it guilty or innocent. What does Noah learn about freedom from this? About letting go?
18. In Chapter 4, when Noah is riding with Connor Strait, we learn about the many things Noah desires. What are some things that Noah wants? How do they motivate Noah throughout the story? Does Noah attain his desires? How do his desires change as the story unfolds?
19. What does the Purple Heart symbolize? When Noah chooses to leave it behind and escape from the Wandering Stars, what does he learn about letting go? What else does he let go of?
20. What does Noah learn about forgiveness by the end of the novel? Who all does he forgive and why? Is there anybody he doesn't forgive...and why?

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