

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SANDRA
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TENMILE



Reading
group
questions for
discussion.

Tenmile Discussion Questions
Created by EduSolve, LLC
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The following questions are intended to help enhance readers' enjoyment of the story and also offer opportunities for thoughtful discussion of some of the issues contained within.

1. "I hope she grows up to be as helpful as you," Mrs. Burke continued. *I hope I won't be here to see it, Sissy thought. I hope I'll be a long way from here by then.* (p. 4). This is our first introduction to Sissy's feelings about her life in Tenmile. Where do you call home? How do you feel about where you live? Can you compare it to other places?
2. There are places where Sissy finds joy and happiness in Tenmile. Where are they? How do they make her feel? Where do *you* go to find joy or peace?

3. Sissy thinks, “Life was so hard on the Tenmile. Was it this hard in other places?” (p. 98). Think about some things in life that are hard for you. What do you do to work through those difficult or hard times?

4. In the 1880s, mining communities had to live in difficult times. We’ve just come off three years of a pandemic. What were your most difficult experiences during the pandemic?

5. Sissy constantly talks about her hopes and dreams for herself and for her friends (Jack and Nelle). What are your hopes and dreams for yourself, or maybe even for the world?

6. Sissy experiences the tragic loss of her mother at a very young age. Have you experienced loss? How has it changed your outlook on the world?

7. Much of Sissy’s world revolves around her friendships with Jack and Nelle. What does it mean to be a good friend? What qualities or positive traits do you bring to your friendships?

8. We know that the story is set in 1880 in a coal-mining town in Colorado, and the plot centers around a young white girl, her white friends, and their families. How would this story be different if Sissy were Black, Latina (Latinx), or Native American?

9. Tenmile offers us a glimpse into the coal-mining life of the late 1800s. What were Black or Latinx teenagers experiencing in different areas of the country at that time? Compare Sissy's experience to that of a Native American 13-year-old girl. Can you identify any similarities or differences?

10. Sissy often speaks of the conditions of the homes in Tenmile (and Chicken Flats) that families have to live in. Then, when asked to tutor Master William, she sees (and works in) a house like no other in Tenmile. Compare the Gilpins' family life to that of the other community members of Tenmile. Can you make these comparisons today? (p. 105)

11. The word "gossip" is used throughout the story. What does it mean to gossip, and how is gossip different today,

especially with social media, from when Sissy used the term?

12. Sissy talks about being able to help someone, and how that makes her feel. How can gratitude or kindness help not just the person receiving but also the person being kind or showing gratitude? Has there been a time recently when you made an effort to share your gratitude? How did you feel afterward? (p. 131)

13. On page 133, Doc tells Sissy that women can't be doctors. Fast-forward over 150 years, and female doctors are everywhere. How did those first few women struggle, and what struggles do women in these roles still face today? (p. 133)

14. At Christmas, Sissy helps deliver baskets of food for families in need. One of the boys remarks that if he had all the money in the world he'd eat a banana every day. Many people today say that in America, we live in "a land of plenty," but there are some families that have very little access to food. Is this true in your community, and if so, what can be done about it?

15. How does Sissy handle the loss of Jack, her best friend? How is losing a friend different from losing a family member?

16. Greenie uses the expression “tap ’er light” when bidding farewell to folks in the community of Tenmile. What does “tap ’er light” mean? Do you (or your friends or family) have any unique or special expressions? What’s the story behind your unique expression?

17. On page 186, when Sissy is asked if a family is poor, she replies, “They’re not poor, they just don’t have any money.” Do you think there is a difference between being poor and not having money?

18. Toward the end of the story Nelle (and her sister) are no longer living in Tenmile. Even though Greenie alludes to what happened, the issue of child abuse is never directly discussed. Why do you think that is? If you were in Greenie’s shoes, what would you have done?

19. After Sissy helps with the cave-in at the coal mine and then delivers the Washington baby by herself, a feeling of

pride swells within her. What does it mean to have pride? Do you share your joy and pride with others?

20. What happens to Sissy? If you could write the next chapter of the book, where do you imagine your story will take her?

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Sandra Dallas is the *New York Times*-bestselling author of the middle-grade novels *Hardscrabble*, *The Quilt Walk*, *Red Berries*, *White Clouds*, *Blue Sky*, and *Someplace to Call Home*. A member of the Colorado Authors' Hall of Fame, she is the author of ten nonfiction books and seventeen adult novels, including *The Last Midwife*, *Prayers for Sale*, *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*, *The Persian Pickle Club*, and *Little Souls*. A former Denver bureau chief for *Business Week* magazine, she is the recipient of three National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum Wrangler awards, four Western Writers of America Spur Awards, and six Women Writing the West WILLA Awards. She lives in Denver and Georgetown, Colorado. Visit her at www.sandradallas.com.

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