

# PECULIAR SAVAGE BEAUTY



## A Reading and Discussion Guide

1. “There are two things that interest me: the relation of people to each other, and the relation of people to land.” This quote by Aldo Leopold was a great source of inspiration to the author as she wrote the novel. What are your thoughts on how “the land” or nature in general impacts our lives and our relationships?
2. Different characters in *Peculiar Savage Beauty* responded to the constant barrage of dust in different emotional ways – anger, sadness, resignation, defiance. How do you think you would respond?
3. The setting and dusts are intrinsic to the story. Discuss ways in which the land and the dust function as characters in the novel.
4. Though RJ was fiercely independent, often-times to her own detriment, she grew to realize being independent does not have to mean being alone. What do you think led her to understand and accept that we need others to thrive in life?
5. What is the significance of the title? Do you think it refers only the land and our relationship with the land, or do you think it has additional meaning?
6. Not all people on the autism spectrum possess the same personality traits, unique skills and social/sensory challenges. How does the author’s portrayal of Woody measure up to your understanding of or experiences with autism?
7. Harvey turned out to be a great source of frustration for RJ, even though there was much about him that she loved. How did you feel about Harvey? Did your feelings about him change throughout the story?
8. Do you think Ethel intentionally took her life? Is it possible her deep despair brought her to such a state of confusion that she didn’t understand the danger of the storm?
9. *Peculiar Savage Beauty* explores familial themes. What defines family? Who do you think RJ’s truest family members were? What role did family play for other characters?
10. How do environmental themes in *Peculiar Savage Beauty* parallel environmental concerns today? Are there lessons that can be drawn from The Dust Bowl that might help educate the current generation of farmers and scientists?