Memory of Water by Emmi Itaranta
Discussion Questions

This guide includes questions for discussion for each chapter, framing questions relating to the themes of the book, and video resources that can be used to generate discussion. Enjoy this opportunity to use fiction as a springboard for discussion about environmental sustainability and the future of our planet’s resources. Encourage the students you work with to connect themes of the book to their own lives and to participate in the campus events planned for this year. Find more information here: http://blogs.millersville.edu/oboc/

Before Reading Discussion Topics/Questions:
- Identify present-day Scandinavia on a map. Discuss pertinent geographical features. How does the author reference geographical features in the story. What does Sanja’s and Noria’s world look like?
- Brainstorm current issues related to the environment.
- Who owns water?
- Is water a human right?
- Or this website: http://waterfootprint.org/en/
- When you think of the Earth 100 years from now, what comes to your mind? Is it important to live your life with the future generations in mind?
- What will the artifacts you leave behind tell future generations about our lives?
- What is your stance on global warming?
  - In the news! CNN story on the town of Woodward, Oklahoma where many people don’t believe in global warming. CNN Global Warming Story

During Reading - Chapter by Chapter Questions

Prologue
- What emotional tone does the prologue set?
- What do you think it means that “…water doesn’t care for human sorrows” (p. 1)?

Part I
Chapter One
- “Death is water’s close companion” (p. 5). What does this mean?
- Describe what you think a “tea master” does. What is the significance of this role?
“Silence is not empty or immaterial, and it is not needed to chain tame things. It often guards powers strong enough to shatter everything.” (p. 13) How could you describe silence in a few words? How do you think this explanation differs or is similar to your own?

Chapter Two

- In Chapter 2, we learn more about the setting of this story. What are clues that the story is not set in the present?
- Use a Venn Diagram to compare our world as it is today and the world as described in the text. Keep adding to this throughout the book.
- In this chapter, we learn more about the character of Sanja, who is also mentioned in the prologue. What do you still want to know about her? What role does she play?
- What is the significance of the door with the blue circle? Can you connect this to any current news stories? (i.e Tom Selleck: http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2015/07/08/tom-selleck-accused-of-stealing-water-for-california-ranch/2987046/)

Chapter Three

- What is your initial reaction to Commander Taro and Major Bolin?
- On p. 33, the tea ceremony is described like this: “And you must know, Major Bolin, that the tea ceremony in all its present-world forms is no more than an impure, confused relic of the original past-world forms that have long been forgotten.” What is the purpose of the tea ceremony?

Chapter Four

- The term “Twilight Century” is introduced on p 40. What do you think this means?
- What is meant by the quote “I believe the world wouldn’t be what it is today if it wasn’t for people” (p. 40)? Do you think people have had a net positive or net negative impact on the earth? Why?
- Which types of technology described in the book do you recognize? What are you surprised to read about technology in this setting?
- What are Noria’s parents arguing about on p. 45. Why?
- On p. 44, Noria asks, “What about me, is anybody asking what I want?” What do each of her parents want her to do? What does she want?

Chapter Five

- In this chapter, Sanja and Noria make an important discovery. Talk about what they find and what you think it might mean.

Chapter Six

- What does this chapter reveal about Sanja’s character?

Chapter Seven

- In this chapter, Noria makes a difficult choice. Discuss the potential significance of her decision.
- “Water has a consciousness.” (p. 90). What do you think this means?
“We are the watchers of water, but first and foremost we are its servants.” (p. 91). What is your relationship to water? What do you feel this way about in your own life?

Chapter Eight
- What did this chapter make you think about race and gender?
- How is the Moonfeast similar to or different from another holiday you know?
- Read the oath of the Tea Master ceremony (p. 102) together, “I am a watcher of water. I am a servant of tea. I am a nurturer of change. I shall not chain what grows, I shall not cling to what must crumble. The way of tea is my way.” Why is this significant to Noria?

Part II
Chapter Nine
- This first page of this chapter echoes (w/slight variations) the first page of Chapter 1. (See also Chapter 17). Why does the author use repetition? Are the variations significant?
- “When the water runs dry, we are of earth alone.” (p. 114). What do you think this means?

Chapter Ten
- What are the differences in uses of water by families in the town?
  - Sanja’s family? Noria?
- How do Noria and Sanja respond to the families begging for water?
- How is it possible to help those who have limited access to resources?
- How does the blue circle show up in this chapter?
- Noria thinks “I didn’t know how many changes I would have to make to make my life appear the same as any other villagers” (p. 134). What conflicts is Noria feeling?
- Why is Noria angry with past tea masters? What does she wish they had shared? (p. 137).
- What is significant about the past-world stories Noria is beginning to uncover?

Chapter Eleven
- Noria reads the tea masters books. What does she find?
- What is the significance of Noria’s mother’s request about the spoon?

Chapter Twelve
- “Secrets carve us like water carves stone.” (p. 161). What does this mean to you?
- To what risk would you go to help a friend? How do you decide when to take a risk for someone else?
- Discuss Sanja’s reaction when Noria reveals the spring to her.
- On p. 163, Noria says, “I thought of the past tea masters, their choices and their duties.” What do you think this means?

Chapter Thirteen
- Was Noria ready to take over the job as tea master? Do you think she took her role seriously? Why or why not?
Chapter Fourteen
- “Once the silent space around a secret is shattered, it cannot be made whole again.” (p. 184).
- Discuss.
- What do you think Sanja and Noria heard on the discs?

Chapter Fifteen
- Rewards are being offered to anyone who turns someone in suspected of committing water crimes. Does this remind you of any event from history?
- Do you trust Sanja? Why or why not?

Chapter Sixteen
- Discuss the events in this chapter. What are Noria’s plans?

Part III
Chapter Seventeen
- Chapter 17 begins with the same first sentence as Chapter 1. Why is this repeated here? (See also Chapter 9).

Chapter Eighteen
- Discuss the offer Taro makes to Noria and her response.
- “I believe that we must make hard choices every day despite knowing there is no reward.” (p. 246). Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- What makes a choice difficult? How do you decide when you have to make a difficult choice?

Chapter Nineteen
- Discuss the ending of the story.
- Noria indicates that she needs to tell her own story (p. 254). She also mentions this at the very beginning of the book (see the top of p. 6) and near the end (bottom of p. 260). Why do you think this is so important to her?

Epilogue
- Did the author leave an opening for a sequel to this story?

After Reading Discussion Topics/Questions:
- Why do you think this book was selected for the One Book One Campus program this year at Millersville?
- Does this book remind you of any other books you’ve read or television shows or movies you’ve seen?
- Several metaphors are used throughout this book about water. Identify as many as you can find and discuss the significance of each.
- If the title is any indication, “memory” is as important as water in this book. Point out some of the ways the book addresses/explores memory.
- The word “secrets” appears in the book 41 times. What is the significance of this?
Consider using the **Observe, Question, Reflect** approach (Library of Congress)

- **Observe**: describe the culture evidenced in the book
  - What everyday actions and objects/things are used in this future world?
  - What technology/communication tools are used?
  - If you were putting on a play based on the book, what evidence from the book would you use to create the scenery, props, colors, costumes?

- **Question**: what do you wonder about? what would you like to learn more about?
  - What questions do you have?
  - What doesn’t make sense about this world?
  - How did water become such a scarce resource?
  - Create a timeline of the time periods between the oil wars and the time period Noria and Sanja lived in. What can you piece together about what happened?

- **Reflect**: how is this world like ours? different from ours?
  - how do characters develop their identity?/how do we?
  - What types of jobs/occupations do people have in this future world? how are they similar to or different from ours?
  - what cultural values mark this future culture?/what values are we leaving behind for the future?
  - what class/race/gender issues are present in the book/in our world relating to environmental sustainability?

- Identify cultural markers or artifacts that link the world created in this book to the world we live in. What is the significance of the items that are selected?
- What lingering questions are you left with after reading this book?
- Discuss Noria as a character. Is she strong or weak in your opinion? Support your argument with evidence from the text. How do Noria’s choices contribute to her identity?
- Discuss Sanja as a character. In your opinion, is she a protagonist or an antagonist? Support your argument with evidence from the text.
- Consider the relationships between Noria and her parents and compare that to Sanja’s relationship with her family. What are similarities and differences?
- What is childhood like in this future world?
- Choose two chapters to compare & contrast.
- Create an action plan for yourself or with a group. How can you be a better “steward of the earth”?
- Research groups and organizations that are committed to water issues. What will you do as a result?
- Consider how important the following issues are to understanding the culture of this future world:
  - roles that women and men play within society (is it okay for Noria to be a tea master?)
  - what is the importance of understanding a culture’s history? what has been lost in this culture because information about previous ages are gone? how does access to the tea masters’ journals provide insights for Noria?
○ how would you read this story if you believed that the dangers of climate change were a myth?

**Video Resources for *Memory of Water***

Interview with Emmi Itaranta [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq1PcdscMXE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq1PcdscMXE)

Tea Ceremony Explained [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6_KC3OuZEk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6_KC3OuZEk)

Documentary of Japanese Tea Ceremony [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gx59Y8VFse0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gx59Y8VFse0)

Global Warming Debate [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWT-EWK1R3M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWT-EWK1R3M)

Interview with Freeman Dyson [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiKfWdXXfIs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiKfWdXXfIs)

California drought documentary [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPhHCriZrBs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPhHCriZrBs)

How California’s drought affects the world [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIet8eXDFbK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIet8eXDFbK)

Is water a human right? [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV68_vW46RY&list=UUgRvm1yLFoaoQKhmaTqXk9SA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV68_vW46RY&list=UUgRvm1yLFoaoQKhmaTqXk9SA)


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