

Book Group Discussion Questions for  
*Whistling Women* by Kelly Romo

1. Have you ever heard the proverb, “A whistling woman and a crowing hen always come to some bad end”? What does it mean and how might a young person in today’s society not understand it?
2. What are the parallels and differences between the two sets of sisters? Addie and Wavey and Rumor and Mary?
3. In which ways is Wavey protective? In which ways is she destructive? Why do you think she handles things the way she does?
4. Which of the sisters do you think made the biggest sacrifice and faced the biggest hurdles? Why?
5. Which character do you think made the greatest transition throughout the novel?
6. In the end, Addie gets what her heart most desired—to be close to her sister. In which ways do you think Addie will have trouble adjusting?
7. What do you feel about Papa Jack? Do you have any sympathy for him? At what point did you realize his true nature?
8. Thinking about the other characters: Ty, Daisy, Sal, Heinrich, Frieda, Joe, the Chickens, the other nudists, Officer Clyde Darby, Ruth, Mrs. Keegan, Kaiser Pitt, Mildred Stucky, and Ruby Anne—which one stood out to you the most and why?
9. In Chapter 5, Addie makes the following observation about Sal: “He looked different in clothes, not so wholesome and robust. The cheap trousers and wool cap pigeonholed Sal, making him appear no different than one of the thousands of desperate young men willing work long hours for little pay. Back at the colony Sal’s youth, bronze skin, and strapping muscles gave him the appearance of a Greek hero—like Jason ready to hop aboard the Argo. Funny how clothing could make a person appear worthless and shabby when they are not.” What do you think about this quote? Do you agree with the statement about how clothing can pigeonhole a person? What other images of clothing do you remember in the novel? What other things in society pigeonhole people?
10. At the end of Chapter 15, Heinrich tells Addie, “An old man surrounded by beautiful young women is a picture of vitality. It is not the same for an old woman.” What do you think about Heinrich’s philosophy that old female

- nudists are not good business even though he himself is about the same age as the women he is throwing out? Is he right? As a society, to what extent have we, or have we not, gotten past this notion?
11. *Nacktkultur* (nakedness and vegetarianism) was well accepted in Germany in the 1930's. Why do you think it failed in the United States?
  12. In Chapter 15, Addie states that Heinrich and Sister Aimee had been 'cut from the same cloth'. Do you believe that both Heinrich and Sister Aimee are evangelists, just with different causes? Do you believe that they are more alike than different? In which ways?
  13. In real life, Sister Aimee Semple McPherson had originally agreed to meet with Frieda for tea, but then changed her mind. Frieda's explanation to Addie in Chapter 17 was that Sister Aimee didn't come because, "Casting judgment is easy, but seeing yourself in another is not." Frieda gave further explanation that both she and Sister Aimee have shed the traditional roles of women as domestic prisoners--and have taken the sexual exploitation of women and used it to their own advantage. Do you agree with Frieda's assessment of the situation?
  14. Many groups and individuals were opposed to the nudist colony coming to San Diego and being on exhibit. People put them in the same category as the girly and peepshows. Do you feel that they should've been considered the same? What were the redeeming and the damning qualities of the nudists?
  15. What causes people to judge one another?
  16. What do you see as the failings of society in this novel?
  17. Did it surprise you to know that there was a nudist colony at a world's fair in 1935? How do you think people's perception of the past colors their opinion about the present?
  18. What did you think about the ending? Should Rumor have told what happened to her? Why didn't she?
  19. What makes girls (even now) keep silent about sexual abuse? What can we do as a society to help it?
  20. Has the issue of pedophilia changed each generation? In which ways has it changed and in which ways has it not changed?

Quotes:

“Real freedom was freedom of the spirit. It was not what covered your flesh or did not cover your flesh, it was the tethers of sin on your soul.” (Ch. 1)

“It seemed as if everyone wanted to shape the entire world around their own values.” (Ch. 16)

“Heaven must be an empty place if even thinking a thought made you a sinner.” (Ch. 16)