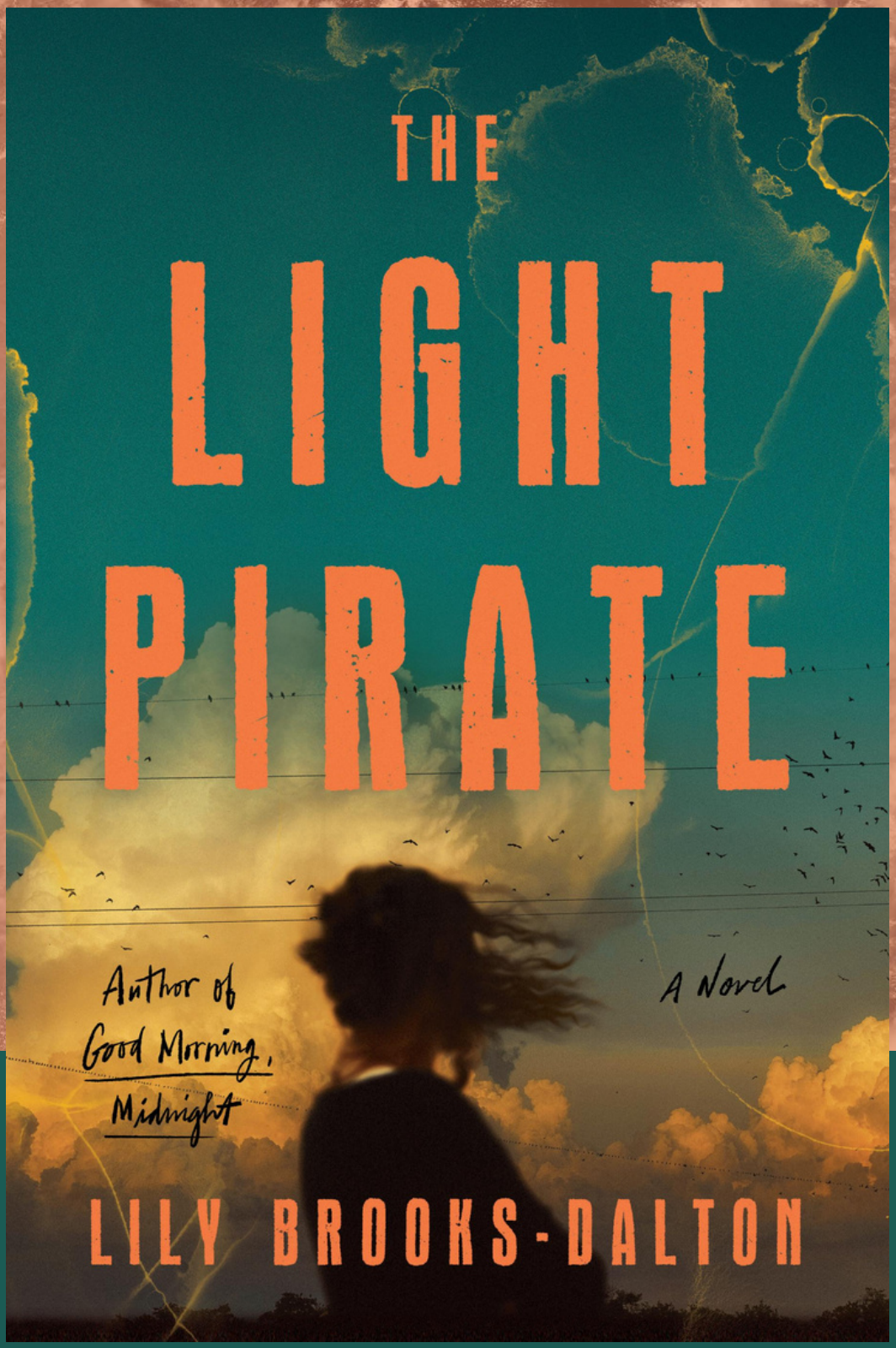


BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The English word "hurricane" is adopted from the Spanish word *huracán*, which is derived from Juracán, the name the Taíno, the Indigenous people of the Caribbean, bestowed upon their God of chaos and destruction. Hurricane Wanda, however, is depicted as a powerful yet impersonal force: "The hurricane takes what yields. Nothing more; nothing less." How do these two interpretations affect your personal feelings about natural disasters—and their consequences?

2. The novel unfolds in four parts: power, water, light, and time. How does *The Light Pirate*'s unique structure mirror Wanda's journey from childhood to adulthood while also speaking to the changes taking hold of the natural world?

3. One major theme of *The Light Pirate* is humanity's turbulent relationship with nature and climate change. Frida is paralyzed by the enormity of a collective decline she sees occurring all over the world. Kirby is determined to ignore it, to focus only on problems with immediate solutions. Phyllis has given up on civilization and is instead preparing for the worst. How did these different coping mechanisms make you think about your own response to the challenges humanity faces?

4. In the face of the world's problems, Kirby and Frida grapple with the idea of bringing a new child into the world. Phyllis is intentional about not wanting to become a mother. Today, some couples are choosing not to have children, in the name of environmental responsibility. Where do you fall in this debate?

5. While the second part of *The Light Pirate* moves readers further into a speculative future, the story begins in the wake of another hurricane, Poppy, which followed the real-life Hurricane Maria, the Category 5 storm that hit Puerto Rico in 2017: "The government had left [Puerto Rico] to drown and sent men like [Kirby] to pretend they'd done all they could." How did this passage—about Kirby confronting future instability, and the U.S. government's failure to support Puerto Rico after these disasters (one real, one fictional)—make you feel? How did it make you think about the hardships Puerto Rico continues to face, years after Maria?

6. When Wanda is a child, the world—as we currently know it—has irrevocably changed. "The Edge" is a creeping new reality, swallowing coastal areas inch by oceanic inch, while hurricanes chip away at existing infrastructure and weaken the electrical grid. As a result, Floridians are driven to seek better living conditions elsewhere. And while the book's gaze is focused on the Sunshine State, we get the sense that other places are facing their own dire challenges. In your own life, how do you think about—and prepare for—changing landscapes and weather? How did the author's depiction of events make you think about our planet's future?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. When confronted "with the rage of a man left behind by civilization" outside what used to be a post office, it occurs to Phyllis that teaching Wanda how to survive the people who stayed in Rudder is paramount. As the novel progresses, we see examples of both the danger and the necessity other people pose to Wanda. What were your thoughts on this conundrum? How would you navigate wariness and trust in such a brutal world?

8. The twins (Corey and Brie/Bird Dog) are two very different kinds of people. How do you reconcile their shared childhood with the adults they grew up to be?

9. The italicized interludes that accompanied each section of the book—power, water, light, and time—are focused on different elements. What did you take away from these passages? Did they change the way you thought about the landscape these characters inhabited?

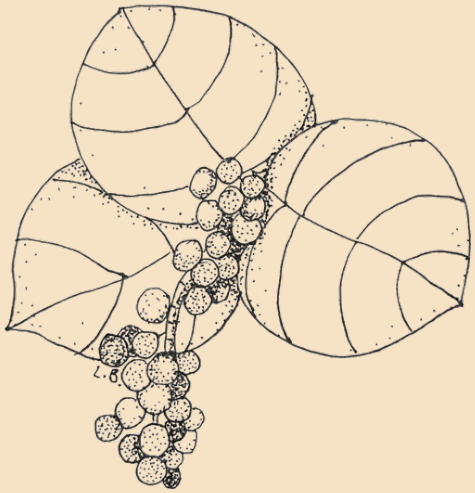
10. Phyllis reflected that the world "would have to collapse in order for a new kind of society to be built; or, more likely, for some other epoch to have its day. Humanity was an ecological disaster. . . . Evolution could do so much better. Someday soon, it would." In this scene, did you agree or disagree with Phyllis's assessment? Why or why not?

11 Discuss the changing relationship between Wanda and Bird Dog/Brie from childhood to adulthood to old age.

12. At the end of the novel, the author presents an epilogue set during Wanda's old age. What did you think of Wanda and Bird Dog's treehouse community on the water? What did you take away from this glimpse of Wanda's future?

FIELD NOTES

Medicinal and/or edible native Florida flora
Drawings by Lisa Brooks



Seagrapes traditionally grow by the shore, hence the name. The fruit is edible and it is similar in taste to a muscadine grape. Unfortunately for foragers, these plants are protected as part of a conservation effort, so if you want to sample them you'll have to plant your own!

Yaupon Holly leaves can be used to make a caffeinated tea that rivals the caffeine content of green tea and is rich in antioxidants. The berries, however, are not edible on their own.

The Cabbage Palm is Florida's state tree. Its buds are edible (and are said to taste like cabbage, go figure) but harvesting them will harm the tree itself, so maybe not the most sustainable snack.

FIELD NOTES

Medicinal and/or edible native Florida flora
Drawings by Lisa Brooks

Horsemint is medicinal and edible. Its leaves can be brewed to make a tea that helps with digestion issues. It can also be used in a poultice to increase blood flow for ailments like arthritis. Not to mention it tastes nice in a salad. Horsemint can be used for lots of things, but bear in mind that too much is toxic, so don't brew that tea too strong.

Mayhaw Berries are a native southern berry that like to grow along riverbanks and bayous, making them somewhat difficult to harvest. The berries are usually (but not always) very tart, ripen to either red or yellow depending on the variety, and are often made into a jelly.

PHYLLIS' FORAGED SALAD

Credited to MarthaStewart.com

Dandelion leaves are the perfect place to start for foraging newbies! All parts of the dandelion plant are edible, and they thrive in most locations and climates.With a good wash and a deliciously simple dressing, they make the perfect light bite to accompany your book club discussions. And if you live in Florida or thereabouts? Maybe throw in some of the horsemint noted above!

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbsp minced shallot
- 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 8 packed cups freshly foraged dandelion greens
- Flaky sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. Whisk together shallot, vinegar, and oil in a small bowl; let stand 1 hour. Whisk dressing; toss with greens. Season with salt and pepper; serve.

CONIFER HOT TODDY

Credited to GrowForageCookFerment.com

Another foraged option for your book club is this warming, comforting hot toddy which can be made with any edible conifer sprigs!

INGREDIENTS

- 2 conifer sprigs (pine, fir, Douglas fir, or spruce)
- 1 Tbsp dried whole rose hips lightly crushed
- 1 Tbsp sliced ginger
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 8 ounces hot water
- 1-2 ounces bourbon or whiskey
- honey or maple syrup to taste
- Orange slices

DIRECTIONS

1. Place conifer sprigs, rose hips, cinnamon stick, and ginger in a french press or teapot and cover with boiling water.
2. Let steep for 15-20 minutes.
3. In a large mug, add 1-2 ounces of whiskey and an orange slice. Strain the tea out into the mug using a fine mesh strainer.
4. Add desired amount of honey or maple syrup and stir well.
5. Garnish the hot toddy with more orange slices, a cinnamon stick, rose hips, or a conifer needle sprig. Serve hot.

BUG OUT BAG

In case of emergencies

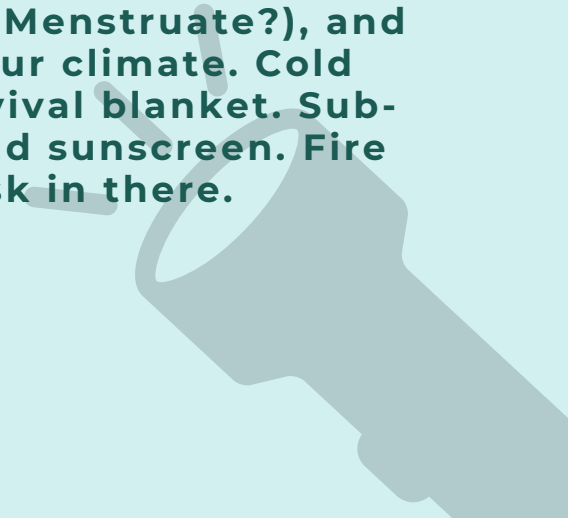
Start with the bag itself, then acquire items in batches. Better a half-finished go bag then no bag at all! A backpack works best—something you won't be tempted to empty out and use for another purpose. The idea being that this bag should always be ready to go.

First, make sure there's a first aid kit, a flashlight, a change of clothes you won't miss, a few days' worth of necessary medications, your favorite kind of energy bar (a few of those), and a full water bottle. Add a few personal hygiene items that you either already have lying around or could pick up at any old pharmacy. What you choose depends on you, but some ideas include: deodorant, wet wipes, toothbrush and toothpaste, etc.

Next, think about adding a portable radio that doesn't require electricity (there are solar and/or crank-charged options, and of course battery operated options as well), a charged power pack that is compatible with your phone (and a charging cord if it doesn't already have one), and a multitool.

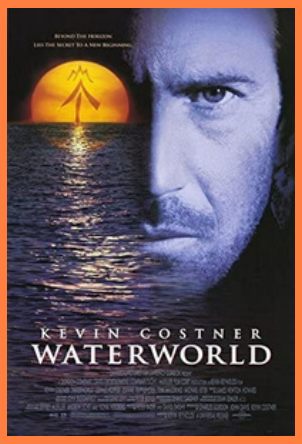
That's a pretty solid bag already! Some other additions might include: a water purification set up, some glow sticks, electrolyte packs, a few lighters, a whistle, extra batteries, rope, and some heavy duty trash bags.

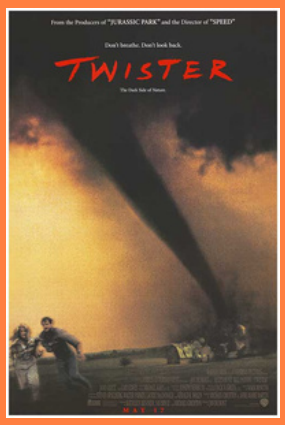
There are all kinds of guides out there with product suggestions and more in-depth considerations of what you might need, but remember above all that only you know what makes the most sense for your situation. Customize the recommendations to suit you specifically (do you need an epipen on hand? Wear contacts or glasses? Menstruate?), and also your geographical area. Think about your climate. Cold weather? Prioritize warm clothes and a survival blanket. Sub-tropical area? Don't forget the bug spray and sunscreen. Fire country? Make sure there's a respirator mask in there.

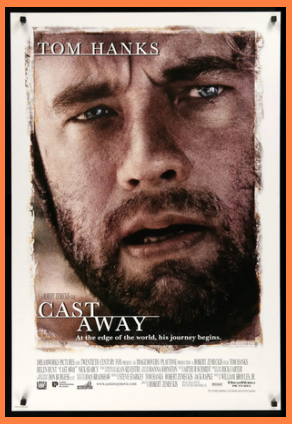


RECOMMENDED VIEWING

A curated watchlist from the author

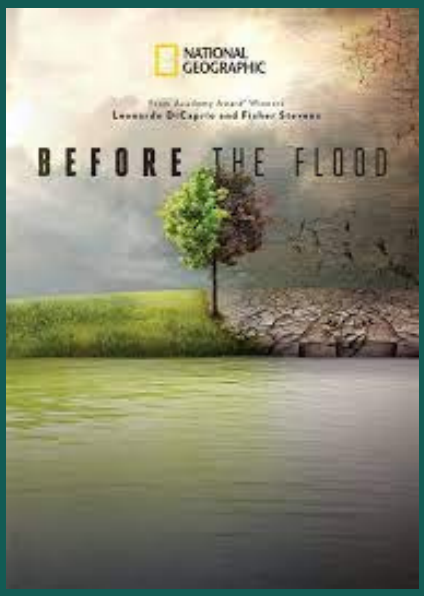






RECOMMENDED VIEWING

Documentaries



HURRICANE RELIEF

The effects of climate change often hit the most vulnerable communities the hardest, as we see when the world seems to leave the town of Rudder and its surrounding areas behind in *The Light Pirate.*

If you are wondering what you can do to help people who have been hit by increasingly strong hurricanes and climate disasters, here a few resources.

NPR rounds up a list of organizations on the ground in Puerto Rico accepting assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona.

Additionally, PBS has guidance on how to help the 33 million citizens of Pakistan who have been effected by unprecedented flooding due to torrential monsoons.

Finally, Axios shared resources for Hurricane Ian relief, which bombarded Florida with record-high storm surges in the fall of 2022.