

ESL Book Club 2024– April Discussion Questions

Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail by Cheryl Strayed

Discussion Date: April 5, 2024, 10:30 am – 12 pm in Central Park Library – Sycamore Room

Summary:

At twenty-two, Cheryl Strayed thought she had lost everything. In the wake of her mother's death, her family scattered, and her own marriage was soon destroyed. Four years later, with nothing more to lose, she made the most impulsive decision of her life: to hike the Pacific Crest Trail from the Mojave Desert through California and Oregon to Washington State—and to do it alone. She had no experience as a long-distance hiker, and the trail was little more than “an idea, vague and outlandish and full of promise.” But it was a promise of piecing back together a life that had come undone.

Strayed faces down rattlesnakes and black bears, intense heat and record snowfalls, and both the beauty and loneliness of the trail. Told with great suspense and style, sparkling with warmth and humor, Wild vividly captures the terrors and pleasures of one young woman forging ahead against all odds on a journey that maddened, strengthened, and ultimately healed her. (From the publisher.)

1. “The Pacific Crest Trail wasn’t a world to me then. It was an idea, vague and outlandish, full of promise and mystery. Something bloomed inside me as I traced its jagged line with my finger on a map”. Why did the PCT capture Strayed’s imagination at that point in her life?
2. Each section of the book opens with a literary quote or two. What do they tell you about what’s to come in the pages that follow?
3. How did you like Strayed’s description of the wilderness? Did you feel like you were hiking with her?
4. Do you think Strayed was too afraid, or not afraid enough? What part of Cheryl’s adventure would have been scariest for you?
5. Strayed chose her own last name. Did she choose well? What did you think when you learned she had assigned this word to herself—that it was no coincidence?
6. On the trail, Strayed encounters mostly men. How does this work in her favor? What role does gender play when removed from the usual structure of society?

7. What does the reader learn from the horrific episode in which Strayed and her brother put down their mother's horse?

8. There are many metaphors throughout the book including Monster (Strayed's backpack) which represents the weight of Strayed's grief and guilt. What other metaphors were in the book (the feather, losing her boots, the Vietnam vet bracelet)?

9. Does the hike help Strayed to get over Paul? If so, how? And if not, why?

10. Strayed says her mother's death "had obliterated me.... I was trapped by her but utterly alone. She would always be the empty bowl that no one could fill" (p 267). How did being on the PCT on her mother's fiftieth birthday help Strayed to heal this wound?

11. What was it about Strayed that inspired the generosity of so many strangers on the PCT?

12. To lighten her load, Strayed burns each book as she reads it. Why doesn't she burn the Adrienne Rich collection?

13. What role do books and reading play in this often-solitary journey?

14. What do you think Strayed learned from her journey? What did you learn? Were you satisfied with the book's conclusion?

15. What would you rate the book? And if you've seen the movie, what did you think of it?