

The Forgetting Time Reading Guide

1. What is the significance of the novel's title? What roles do forgetting and remembering play in the lives of Guskin's characters?
2. How does the novel's narrative structure illuminate its characters as the chapters move back and forth among perspectives? How does the tone in Janie's, Denise's, and Anderson's chapters differ?
3. How did the case studies embedded within the novel affect your reading experience?
4. Most of Anderson's cases are in Southeast Asia. Why do you think that is? How does the novel address the East-West cultural divide?
5. At the end of chapter 2, Anderson reflects: "Never expect. It had been the lesson of his life." How has the unexpected shaped him? How has it shaped Janie and Denise?
6. Anderson gives up prestige and respectability to pursue his chosen path. Does he remind you of other literary heroes? How does he fit in with or complicate the archetypal American striver?
7. In chapter 9, Anderson tells Janie, "Luckily, I'm not in the belief business. I collect data." Do you believe him? How do the scientific and the personal collide in his work?
8. In chapter 20, Janie recalls a Sweet Honey in the Rock song: "Your children are not your children . . . though they are with you, they belong not to you." Discuss the resonances of that song for Janie and for Denise.
9. Discuss the significance of the Emily Dickinson poem that Janie quotes from in chapter 39:

*Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—*
10. Do you agree with Janie's ultimate decision to let Anderson use Noah's case in his book? How do you feel about using children in psychological studies in general?
11. What does Denise mean when she thinks, "Why were we all hoarding love, stockpiling it?"
12. In what ways do Janie, Anderson, and Denise change by the end of the novel?
13. When Janie and Anderson decide to take Noah to Asheville Road, do you think they should have told Denise they were coming? If you were Denise, how would you have responded to them? Would you have given Paul the possibility of redemption and forgiveness?
14. When Anderson begins to pursue his cases, he is looking for "not just nature or nurture, but *something else* that could cause personality quirks, phobias. Why some babies were born calm and others inconsolable. Why some children had innate attractions and abilities." Why do you think children come out the way they do? Do you think his theories are plausible?

15. Discuss Anderson's meditation on consciousness: "If consciousness survived death—and he had shown that it did—then how did this connect with what Max Planck and the quantum physicists realized: that events didn't occur unless they were observed, and therefore that consciousness was fundamental, and matter itself was derived from it? Did that therefore make this world like a dream, with each life, like each dream, flowing one after the other? And was it then possible that some of us—like these children—were awakened too abruptly from these dreams, and ached to return to them?"
16. Have you had any experiences that changed your view of reality or what's possible? Do you believe in life after death? How did your belief or disbelief affect your reading of this novel?