

Reading Guide to *Green Glass Sea* by Ellen Klages

ABOUT THIS BOOK

It's 1943, and 11-year-old Dewey Kerrigan is traveling west to live with her scientist father. No one, neither her father nor the military guardians who accompany her, will tell her exactly where she is going. When she reaches Los Alamos, New Mexico, she learns why: her father is working on a top-secret government program. In Los Alamos, Dewey gets to know eminent scientists, starts tinkering with her own mechanical projects, and becomes friends with a budding artist who is as much of a misfit as she is. All the while, she has no idea how the Manhattan Project her father is working on is about to change the world. This book's fresh prose and fascinating subject make it unlike anything you've read before.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Ellen Klages lives in San Francisco, California. Her story "Basement Magic" won the Nebula Award for Best Novelette in 2005. Her short fiction has been published widely, and she is a graduate of the Clarion South writing workshop. Ellen also serves on the Motherboard of the James Tiptree, Jr. Award (www.tiptree.org). When she's not writing fiction, she collects old toys and sells them on eBay. She is currently working on a sequel to *The Green Glass Sea*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. At the beginning of the book, Dewey is sitting on the front steps of Mrs. Kovack's house in St. Louis. Who is she hoping will appear?
2. According to the book, what is a "fizzler"? A "stinker"?
3. What sort of terrain surrounds the Hill? Why is this important, given the work the scientists are doing there?
4. It is now 1944. Several months have passed since Dewey arrived from St. Louis. Based on what you read beginning in the chapter titled "Jumping Rope," how has she adjusted to life on the Hill?
5. On page 224, Suze and Dewey come home to find a man they know as "Oppie" sitting on the couch. According to the text, who is Oppie? What do the girls think is the reason he has come to the house?

6. Patriotism is very important to the residents of the Hill. Choose any character in the story and think about things he or she does that are patriotic. Why are the actions you have described patriotic?

7. Suze tells Dewey that the rock with Shazam painted on it will give them secret powers, like wisdom or strength. If you had a Shazam rock, what secret power would you want it to give you, and why?

8. Using examples from the text show how Dewey uses numbers and patterns to comfort herself during difficult situations. Why do you think numbers are so important to her?

9. On page 280, the residents of the Hill have learned that "the gadget" works. Mr. Gordon says, "The genie's out of the bottle, Terry. No way to put it back now." What do you think he means by this? Choose two characters from the story and think about how each character reacts to the successful test of the gadget.

10. Late in the story, Dewey uses the word "kinship" to describe her relationship with Mrs. Gordon. Why do you think these two characters get along so well? Do you think Dewey considers any other adult besides her father a friend?

11. On page 290, Dewey thinks to herself, "People don't change." Do you agree with this statement? In your opinion, does Suze change during the story?

12. At the very end of the story, Dewey and the Gordons are driving through the desert when they hear the beginning of a radio broadcast. What do you think the passengers in the car would have heard if Suze had not changed the station?

13. Reread the first few sentences of the first chapter and the first few sentences of the chapter beginning on page 41. What is different about the way the author is using language? Why do you think the author chose to do this?

14. On page 231, Mrs. Gordon says to Suze, "Dewey's a private person, you know." In your opinion, is this an accurate description of Dewey?

15. Secrecy and rules are a part of life for the residents of the Hill. There are off-limits areas, no phones, and the government censors mail. How would you feel if you were a resident of Los Alamos? Would these restrictions frustrate you or would you view them as a way to contribute to the war effort?

16. How do the people on the Hill experience May 8, 1945?

17. What are the responsibilities of scientists? Should all that is scientifically possible actually be done?

18. How will the outcome of the work on the Hill impact the way Dewey remembers her dad?