

Readers Guide

***Mountains of Light*, by Mark Liebenow**

1. What storylines run through the book? What is Mark searching for in Yosemite?
2. How do Mark's experiences in Yosemite compare to your own camping and hiking adventures?
3. Mark grew up outdoors in Wisconsin, walking with his grandfather through the countryside, playing in the woods and swimming in the lake. He felt at home in nature. Why does he want to get close to Yosemite and what is different this time?
4. How does Mark get close to nature? What suggestions does he have for others?
5. Although Mark seeks solace through solitary emersion in the wild beauty of Yosemite, he does interact with others at certain times, especially the rock climbers. Do these encounters help or hinder Mark's search? Does his view on sharing his discoveries change by the end of the book?
6. What groups of people are mentioned through the course of the book? Why are they in the valley, and what does Mark learn from each of them?
7. The words of John Muir guide Mark's adventures in the valley. In what way?
8. John Muir said, "I discovered that going outside was really going in." What did Muir mean, and how is this true for Mark?
9. Mark's wife Evelyn died suddenly of a heart attack when she was in her forties. How does nature help Mark face his loss and help in his recovery from grief?
10. Mark doesn't write profusely about Evelyn in the book, just here and there, much like Peter Matthiessen dealt with his wife's death in *The Snow Leopard*. How is Evelyn present in the book?
11. At the end of the book, after visiting the giant sequoias in the Mariposa Grove, Mark is back in the valley standing in a snowy meadow, listening to people singing Christmas songs to the beat of Native drums and watching meteors shoot through the night sky. What does he decide to do next?
12. Painters, poets, hikers, rock climbers and ordinary tourists have long come to Yosemite for their own reasons. Do you draw special inspiration from the natural world? Is there a unique feeling to places like Yosemite?
13. Wallace Stegner believed "the idea of wilderness" had worth beyond monetary value (e.g. lumber, minerals, coal), and that humans needed to know the wilderness still existed. What did he mean, what are these values, and do you agree?
14. Through their writings, Wendell Berry, Aldo Leopold, and Sigurd Olson express their convictions that we need to change how we think about our natural resources and learn to tread lightly on the earth. Leopold said, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." What threats to our environment concern you the most? What signs of optimism do you see?
15. The National Wildlife Federation says children spend too much time indoors and have become strangers to the natural world around them. Irish writer Seamus Heaney said that if people don't form a bond with the land when they are young, they never do. Do you agree?

16. In the late 1800s, John Burroughs encouraged everyone to step outside and experience the nature that was there, even if they lived in the city. What nature can you see where you live?

17. What do you like most about the book? What is your favorite story or adventure and why? What surprised you in the book?

18. Did you pick up any outdoor skills or camping tips from the book that you might find useful? Which ones?