

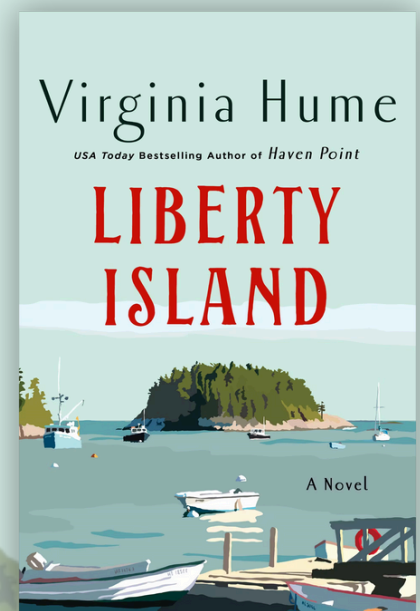
# LIBERTY ISLAND

## Discussion Questions

1. How did the alternating timelines and excerpts from Miss Crane's Liberty Island shape your reading experience?
2. What parallels, if any, did you perceive between society as depicted in these historical settings and our contemporary moment?
3. "We lived in 'society' the rest of the year, but summer was for freedom, for following our affinities." (page 60) How does Julia's perspective of her summers on Liberty Island, and of her mother, shift over the course of the novel, and what drives that shift? How does being away from society's expectations affect the characters and the way they interact with each other?
4. There are several moments throughout the narrative that illustrate the conflict between women's freedom as individuals and the societal obligations and expectations of proper female behavior. Discuss the moments that really stuck out to you.
5. When Julia is irritated by Ruthie's ignorance of the latest news in the suffrage battle, Louisa asks, "What matters more? What they actually did, or how they regard it at this moment?" (page 181) Later in the story, Anna reflects that Elizabeth spoke "through actions and not words." (page 265) Which, if either, do you consider more important in demonstrating commitment? How do you balance what you pay attention to, what you say, and what you do?
6. As Julia grows more interested in sweeping societal change, she begins to disdain her mother's narrower focus on family and immediate community. Have you experienced tension between parochial concerns and engaging with broader movements? What is lost when we, as individuals and society, neglect one in favor of the other?
7. Compare the sibling relationships in Liberty Island—Elizabeth and Anna's, and Julia and William's. Do the dynamics in either relationship mirror those in your own life? What about relationships between mother and daughter, and aunt and niece? What challenges in the mother-daughter dynamic are absent in the aunt-niece dynamic?



8. Friendship is a prominent theme woven throughout the narrative. “It was the readers’ reaction to Liberty Island that taught [Julia]. They wrote of their envy, not just of the girls’ freedom but also of their friendship.” (page 80) Outside of her aunt’s fictionalized version of her life, Julia’s friendships are slightly more complicated. What stood out to you about these relationships, and did any of the dynamics that Julia was navigating feel familiar to you?
9. “Michael was just a boy when his mother gained such fame for her Liberty Island illustrations. Under those circumstances, Julia supposed, he could hardly be anything other than open to women’s opportunities.” (page 81) Toward the end of the novel, Anna says Elizabeth wielded power “judiciously.” When it comes to her power over William, do you agree? What might have dissuaded her from believing she could influence him?
10. Anna and Julia—in different timelines—struggle to trust that Haven Point is truly a haven. What specific cues do they consider when judging its “safety,” and how do those cues ultimately mislead them? What does this reveal about the limits of intuition when entering a new community, if at all? In contrast, how do Anna’s and Julia’s unique qualities, which often make them feel so alienated, positively contribute to the community?
11. Various characters offer opinions on the effects that art and literature have on us, and particularly on children. Pelham Stewart argues that we do not become what we read. Judith Fairchild believes books that expand girls’ imaginations have a pernicious influence, while Anna, Eugenia, and others believe the opposite. Where do you believe the truth sits? Are we all mosaics of what we consume? What books, if any, had a profound influence on you as a child, and why?
12. Consider Julia’s relationship with Pelham versus her relationship with Michael. Did you hope she would end up with one or the other, and if so, did this view change as the story unfolded? What assumptions lead Julia and Anna astray in their romantic relationships, and what helps them achieve their happy endings?



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