

***Youth and the Bright Medusa***  
**Book Club Discussion Questions**



1. How do the short stories in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* reflect the themes often included in Cather's longer fictional works?
2. How does this collection summarize the youthful experience? How does each short story deal with this topic?
3. In "Coming, Aphrodite!" Hedger is infatuated with Eden, yet for a long time, refuses to speak to her. Later, he becomes upset when she attempts to connect him with a well-known studio manager, Mr. Ives. Are these behaviors simply based in a fear of rejection or is it something inherent in his character?
4. How do the two characters of Eden Bower and Don Hedger in "Coming, Aphrodite" represent two different artistic experiences?
5. What is the role of wealth in "The Diamond Mine"? What opportunities does it offer Cressida and how does it negatively affect her? What is Cather saying about materialism in general?
6. What does the Gold Slipper represent to Marshall McKann in "A Gold Slipper"? Why can't he let himself get rid of it?
7. In "Scandal", Kitty becomes frustrated when talking to Pierce, saying:  
"You are all the same; you never see our real faces. What you do see, is some cheap conception of prettiness you got from a colored supplement when you were adolescents. It's too discouraging" (108).  
Could this be considered a modern feminist argument?
8. What changes have occurred in Kitty Ayrshire's life between the end of "The Gold Slipper" and the beginning of "Scandal"?
9. In "Paul's Case" Cather writes that Paul, the main character,  
"had no desire to become an actor, any more than he had to become a musician. He felt no necessity to do any of these things; what he wanted

was to see, to be in the atmosphere, float on the wave of it, to be carried out, blue league after blue league, away from everything” (127).

How does Paul differ in his views about the purpose of art from the rest of the characters in *Youth and the Bright Medusa*?

10. Aunt Georgiana in “A Wagner Matinée” was born in Boston but has spent the large part of her adult life on a farm in rural Nebraska. When she returns, her nephew decides to take her to a matinee but feels as if she will be out of place. However, when the music begins her nephew observes that “ for her, this broke a silence of thirty years” (142).  
What does this say about society's perception of art? How does interacting with art revitalize the characters in this collection?
11. Would it have been better for Aunt Georgiana to never have heard the music she has no access to in her home based on how distraught she becomes at the thought of entering that “silence” again?
12. Cather often uses the image of a train in her writing. What does the train station represent in “The Sculptor’s Funeral”?
13. Similar to “The Sculptor’s Funeral” Cather grew up in a small rural town and gained success in her creative endeavors. Is this short story reflective of the type of reception Cather believed she received when returning home?
14. “A Death in the Desert” is a short story that rests heavily on the use of binaries and doubles. For example, Adriance Hilgarde is Everett’s more admired twin, known for his musical abilities, but Everett and his brother both interest Katharine Gaylord for opposing reasons. What are other binaries Cather uses throughout the story, and what is she trying to accomplish by doing so?
15. *Youth and the Bright Medusa* centers largely around urban areas with characters longing to move to large cities and escape the Plains regions Cather wrote so fondly of in her first novels. How does Cather’s depiction of life on the great plains contrast her depiction of city life?
16. What is Cather saying about being an artist in a rural community? How much of Cather’s own experience is contained in these stories?

17. This collection holds many stories of artists, those who adapt their creativity to what is popular and expected-often in hopes of becoming wealthy-and those who are artists solely for the sake of self-expression and creativity. What stories or characters can be placed in these two characters? How similar are their experiences? What is Cather saying about artistic integrity?
18. How do the various characters in the collection cope with the pressures of becoming a successful artist?
19. Is there a common theme these stories share that points to a solution for a materialistic and unhappy life as an artist?
20. What is the “Medusa” that all eight pieces in the collection have in common?