

A woman in a bright orange, sleeveless, knee-length dress is walking away from the viewer on a sandy beach. She is holding a pair of high-heeled shoes in her left hand. The background shows the ocean and a bright, hazy sky. The overall tone is warm and nostalgic.

THE PIRATE QUEEN

A NOVEL

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READERS GUIDE

1. A writer friend recently said to me that if she were Bender's wife she would tell him to go and convalesce alone. But a marriage of three decades has complicated Saphora's choices. Why do you think she stayed with Bender?
2. Saphora's strongest desire at the outset seems to be to run away from home. But in the end, we discover there were hidden desires realized in Saphora's story. What other intrinsic desires were driving her?
3. The *Southern Living* party frames the story. What was different about Saphora from the day of the party to the day the finished *SL* issue arrived?
4. The women who attend the *Southern Living* party make only a brief appearance, but it is evident they have each played a role that causes Saphora great and inexpressible pain. How did time shift her attitude toward these women? Does that mean she was condoning that type of behavior?
5. Saphora's desire to get away from her family obligations was thwarted in more than one way. Suddenly throwing her grandson Eddie into the mix only added to her frustration. But Eddie's presence drew another person into

her life. If she had gotten her way, how different would her life have been?

6. Saphora's fantasy about an Outer Banks life was reduced to short ruminations in the midst of the clamor of caring for Bender's cancer and the guests filing into and out of their house on the Neuse River. What part did these fantasies play in her acceptance of her circumstances?
7. Luke is a mysterious part of Saphora's Outer Banks journey. What qualities did Luke possess that drew Saphora into his strange quest?
8. Gwennie is equal parts Saphora and Bender, although Saphora only sees her husband's qualities in her daughter. How does their alliance affect the story's outcome? How are these two women strengthened by their relationship?
9. What symbolism unfolds through the metaphor of the Pirate Queen?
10. Pastor Mims is benevolent, but in what ways does he assert himself into the Warren family? Whether or not you are a person of religious faith, how did you respond to the way he engaged their predicament?
11. Tobias has learned to live with survival strengths that benefit him later and in unexpected ways. Bender's care for him is eventually reciprocated. What bond was formed through these acts of compassion?

12. The class distinctions and domestic responses between the Warrens and the Linker family are more fully realized after Jamie's accident. How did you respond to Saphora's involvement in this family's bereavement process? How different was Mel Linker's response to illness and grief from Saphora's?

13. John Mims makes a surprising move at the end of the story. Why might he have waited so long to respond to Saphora romantically?