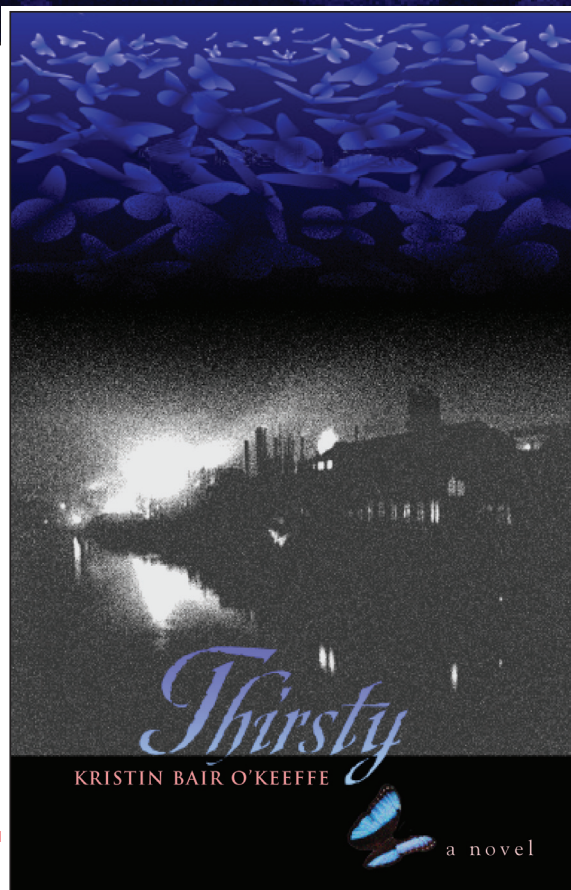


Reader's Guide

"*Thirsty* is a beautiful tale, vivid and gently told. It is the story of one woman's incredible strength of spirit, and a reminder of the foundation contemporary America is built upon—one of unspeakable cruelty, and Job-like suffering, as well as generosity and unbreakable hope."

—Don De Grazia, author of
American Skin



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Thirsty

About This Book

It is 1883, and all of Klara Bozic's girlish dreams have come crashing down as she arrives in Thirsty, a gritty steel town carved into the slopes above the Monongahela River just outside of Pittsburgh. She has made a heartbreaking discovery. Her new husband, Drago, is as abusive as the father she left behind in Croatia.

In Kristin Bair O'Keeffe's debut novel, Klara's life unfolds over forty years as she struggles to find her place in a new country where her survival depends on the friends who nurture her: gutsy, funny Katherine Zupanovic, who isn't afraid of Drago's fist; BenJo, the only black man in Thirsty to have his own shop; and strangely enough, Old Man Rupert, the town drunk.

Thirsty follows a chain of unlikely events that keep Klara's spirit aloft: a flock of angelic butterflies descends on Thirsty; Klara gives birth to her first child in Old Man Rupert's pumpkin patch; and BenJo gives her a talking bird. When Klara's daughter marries a man even more brutal than Drago, Klara is forced to act. If she doesn't break the cycle of violence in her family, her granddaughters will one day walk the same road, broken and bruised. As the

threads that hold her family together fray and come undone, Klara must decide whether she has the courage to carve out a peaceful spot in the world for herself and her girls.

"Kristin Bair O'Keeffe's **Thirsty** has all the power of a small miracle. The mysteries of nineteenth century, small town factory life—the sudden appearance of thousands of butterflies, an extraordinary affliction of hiccups, a talking bird—brilliantly transcend the accumulation of everyday cruelties. A remarkably good read."

—Joe Meno, author of *The Great Perhaps* and *Hairstyles of the Damned*



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About This Guide

The introduction and discussion questions are intended to enhance your group's reading of Kristin Bair O'Keeffe's debut novel **Thirsty**. (Please note: This guide reveals details about the ending. If you haven't yet read **Thirsty** and don't want to know what happens to Klara before you do, don't peek.)

1. How is a historical novel about the steel industry relevant to our world today?
2. Klara decides to marry Drago and immigrate to the United States with him as quickly as some of us decide to buy a new car. What compels her? What quick decisions have you made that led to less-than-stellar consequences? Is Klara so different from the rest of us?
3. The town of Thirsty is as much a character in the book as Klara or Drago. Explain why.
4. What is the significance of the butterflies' arrival in Thirsty?
5. Early in the story, Klara remembers her mother saying, "We all die many deaths." What does her mother mean? How does that sentiment play out in the book?
6. With whom do you identify more . . . Klara or Katherine? In what ways?
7. Despite the fact that Klara and Katherine are opposites in many ways, they are best friends. How does this work? Have you ever had a close friend who was different from you? What were the joys and challenges of the friendship?
8. What does **Thirsty** say about mothers and daughters? Do you believe that mother-daughter relationships have changed significantly since Klara's time?
9. Sexuality and promiscuity are strong forces in the novel. In what ways does sex serve as both a source of power and weakness for Sky?
10. An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault every year in the United States.* Does this number surprise you? What do you make of the fact that over one hundred years after Klara's time, we are still grappling with domestic violence?

Reader's Guide

*Statistics quoted by the National Coalition of Domestic Violence. [<http://www.ncadv.org/>]

11. What is your impression of the men in **Thirsty**? Do they break or perpetuate stereotypes? How so?
12. How do the cultural attitudes toward the sexes and ethnicities present themselves in the novel and how do they differ from those today?

13. Why is it important that Sky accepts Old Man Rupert's offer for Klara?
14. You've just read **Thirsty**, and a friend spots it in your bag. "What's it about?" she asks. You say . . . what?
15. You can ask the author one question. What do you ask?

Order online to receive a 20% discount!
Or ask for this book at your local bookseller.

Read an interview with Kristin Bair O'Keeffe and download this reading guide at www.ohioswallow.com (search for the **Thirsty** book page).

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