

Discussion Questions



FOX AND I

CATHERINE RAVEN

*Spiegel
and Grau*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Raven writes that Fox taught her to strive to be a verb rather than a noun: to write rather than be a writer; to say she teaches rather than that she is a teacher. What are the things you do that help define who you are? How would you describe yourself as a verb rather than as a noun? Do you find this distinction meaningful or simply semantic? And if the change in orientation is a useful one, why?
2. Though Raven lives alone, books keep her company. She identifies with characters like Victor Frankenstein, the prince from *The Little Prince*, and Ishmael of *Moby-Dick*, with whom she discusses subjects like eating meat and what it means to be part of society. Who are the characters in literature you most identify with? If you were to hold an imaginary conversation with one of them, how would it go?
3. As a biologist, Raven is wary of being accused of anthropomorphism, the notion that animals might have human traits, an idea that is frowned upon in most of the academic world. And yet as she grew to know Fox, she found that he had an individual personality. As she points out, it is more acceptable to assign human characteristics to pets (who are often thought to resemble their owners) than to wild animals. Do you believe Raven was projecting a personality onto Fox, or did she know him as one knows a friend?

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4. *Fox and I* is called a memoir because it recounts in the first person the author's memories of her friendship with a fox. And yet sections of the book are told from the author's imagined perspective of the animals with whom she shares the land. Did you find these descriptions convincing? Did they enhance your experience of the narrative or distract you? Did they deepen your understanding of the book's themes?
5. Raven shares very little with the reader about her childhood; like the character of the little prince, she prefers to look forward, not backward. Would learning more about her childhood have given you a better understanding of her friendship with Fox? Was her choice of focusing on the present a strength of the book, or would more information about her background have provided a more satisfying read? For those who have read *The Little Prince*, have you ever wondered about the prince's background? Would that book have benefitted from more of a backstory, or would knowing more about the prince detract from the book?
6. In an interview, Raven has stated that nature isn't a mother; rather, it is a community, by which she means that it's part of us. Is this a helpful distinction? How would this shift in definition change our relationship with nature?
7. The book begins with Raven seeing a rainbow while she's out running. The rainbow reminds her of the transient nature of the world around us and makes her reconsider the idea of becoming friends with a short-lived creature. Have you ever had a similar experience in your own life—one that made you acutely aware of the passage of time and the impermanence of things?
8. Raven pays keen attention to the land and creatures around her, from weeds to trees to birds to deer. She takes seriously her responsibility to her land and spends a great deal of time thinking about the needs of its various inhabitants. And yet she doesn't revere nature indiscriminately.

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She detests the feral cats that roam her property and tries to get rid of the omnipresent voles, and she's also a hunter. Did you find her attitude contradictory, or does being part of nature mean that we have wild impulses too?

9. *Fox and I* is a story about an interspecies friendship. Friendship implies a reciprocal relationship. Do you believe such a relationship is possible with a nonhuman? Was there a turning point in the book when you began to believe that Raven and Fox were truly friends? Did you learn anything about friendship from their relationship? What are the most important characteristics of friendship?
10. Though *Fox and I* was written before Covid-19, many of its themes felt especially relevant during the pandemic: living in isolation; rethinking our relationship to the natural world; living with wildfires and other natural disasters; coming to a new understanding of the value of friendship. In what ways has the pandemic influenced your reading of the book?
11. If you were to read to a fox, what book would you choose and why?
12. Raven's friendship with Fox changes her. How would you characterize those changes? What are some of the things she learns from the fox? Why does she feel it's important to leave the fox a legacy by writing this book?