



Book Club in a Bag Discussion Questions

Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth by Sarah Smarsh

1. Smarsh and her brother were each born just weeks before Reagan won an election, and his economic policies had a tremendous impact on her childhood. Can you describe what that impact looked like?
2. There were many car wrecks in the author's life and in the lives of members of her family. Why do you think that is?
3. Betty often said that homeless people should "get a job," even though she and her family struggled economically. How do you think her values were affected by the class system?
4. Many of the women in Smarsh's family endured physical violence at the hands of their boyfriends, husbands, and fathers. In what ways does gendered violence inhibit economic stability?
5. Smarsh writes that the women in her family had an "old wisdom" that had more to do with intuition than knowledge or education. Where do you see this in action in the lives of female characters?
6. Smarsh is the product of generations of teen pregnancy on her mother's side. How did this legacy of teenage pregnancy affect her family's social and economic mobility?
7. Consider the specific reality of Smarsh's life as a high-achieving high school student. What pushed her to excel?
8. Smarsh argues that "this country has failed its children." Do you agree? How does her story demonstrate that, or fail to?

The above questions were taken from
<https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/non-fiction/11375-heartland-smarsh?start=3>
to enhance your discussion of the book.

Author Biography

Journalist and writer, Sarah Smarsh has covered socioeconomic, class, politics, and public policy articles for major publications in the United States. She was a Shorenstein Fellow at the Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 2018.

<https://www.sarahsmarsh.com/about>

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