



Discussion Questions for Book Clubs

1. How does Leona change as she matures and ages? In what ways does she stay the same?
2. How does Aurelius change as he matures and ages? In what ways does he stay the same?
3. Do you think people fundamentally stay the same as they grow older, or do most of us change a lot as we age?
4. How do the class differences between Leona and Augustine impact their relationship and their later lives?
5. What are Leona's greatest strengths? What are her weaknesses?
6. Aurelius is torn between different people's expectations of him. How does he resolve these conflicts?
7. Do you think Aurelius treated Leona well? Why or why not?
8. Urbanus was Aurelius's patron and had a lot of power over his life. How did he influence hinder or aid Aurelius and Leona?
9. What is the significance of the name that Leona gives to her son versus the name that Monnica requested that she give him?
10. Pears appear in both the first and last chapters of the book. What do you think the pears symbolize?
11. In what ways was life in the late Roman Empire similar to our modern lives? In what ways was it different? Were you surprised by the similarities?
12. In what ways is the accident at the circus a turning point in the story?
13. The Saint's Mistress takes place shortly after Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Most of the characters in the book were not Christians at the start of the story. What were their different reasons for converting to Christianity? How were they changed by their faith?
14. Saint Augustine's mother, Monnica, was also sainted, because her devotion "prayed her son into the church." Do you think that was justified? What were Monnica's strengths and weaknesses? Did you sympathize with her?
15. How do Leona's feelings toward Monnica change over the course of the story? How do Monnica's feelings toward Leona change?
16. What drives Leona to the convent? Do you think she made the right decision?

17. How does the reappearance of Miriam and Lucy help Leona deal with her grief over Adeo's death?
18. In his Confessions, Augustine mentions his long-time mistress only briefly, and never names her. Why do you think he did that?
19. Did you identify with any of the characters? Which one and why?
20. Is the Roman Empire itself a character in this novel? How?