

Reader's Guide Questions for *King Daniel*

1. Gasparilla and the society events surrounding it—the Queen's Ball, the Coronation—shape Natalie's decision-making as the matriarch of the Westcotts. She is driven to preserve the family's name, and Daniel's reputation as King. Discuss a few examples of how her choices have in some ways harmed her family? Does Natalie's past inform her desire to fit into this society?
2. Becca has broken free of the constraints of Tampa society by fleeing the city and refusing to return to serve as a maiden in the Gasparilla court. Her boyfriend, Adam, mistakenly refers to the event as "Sarsaparilla." How firmly entrenched is Becca in the societal constructs of her childhood? What instances in the book support her connection to this society? Which moments reveal her struggle to distance herself from it?
3. The book takes place during a Florida summer, with its bright sun, afternoon rainstorms, scent of confederate jasmine, and oppressive humidity. These elements take their toll on the deteriorating Westcott mansion. How does the house reflect the Westcott family itself?
4. The early 1970s was a time of tumultuous changes in the United States. The Vietnam War, abortion rights for women—to name a few. How do these changes affect the world that encircles the Westcotts? In what ways has the Tampa high society of the book kept itself immune from these changes?
5. Prejudice is an accepted form of ostracism within the Tampa community in the 1970's. Victor, Chief Salazar, and Carlos Mendoza represent powerful Latin characters. Emmeline and Morgan, who live in the Heights, represent another part of the community—one of a lower socio-economic group, while Cuda and his cohorts are the criminal element. Daniel's disappearance unites everyone and reveals hidden connections. Discuss the ways that ethnicity and socio-economic differences still divide communities.
6. Natalie sees Daniel's ghost on the grounds and within the Westcott mansion. His appearance helps her sort through his transgressions, and allows her to acknowledge her continued love for him, despite everything. Do you think Natalie knew about the sexual nature of Daniel's relationship with Julia?
7. When Daniel disappears, "Mad Julia" calls her three children home. Her mental instability stems from her father's abuse and her choice to save her daughter. How did the time period along with societal constraints contribute to Julia's choices in the book? What role did the tragedies she's suffered affect her decisions?
8. Rebecca Westcott was intent on saving the Westcott family name and keeping up appearances. What do you think compelled her to bring the diaries to Emmeline?

9. Morgan, Emmeline's granddaughter, longs for the world in the diaries, one which she felt "belonged to her" and is lost. She is described in a ghost-like way with pale hair and skin. How does she serve as a connector between the past and the present?
10. Both Becca and Julia are strong women who have chosen different paths to assert themselves. How are they alike? In what ways are they different?
11. Daniel is the epitome of the Gasparilla Pirate King—gambling, drinking, carousing, and always coming out on top. How does his story of Quinn and the baby rattlers shed light on his mindset? Do you forgive him for his crimes?
12. Discuss the conclusion of the novel. What does Julia's presence on the flotilla reveal to you about her? About her future? How does the theme of forgiveness play out as the novel concludes? How does Julia become the unspoken heroine of the novel?
13. Natalie senses Victor's interest in Becca from the beginning and wishes to encourage it. What does she hope for? Why? What concessions will she make to get what she wants?
14. Eula and Niobe play important roles in the Westcott family. Discuss their presence in the novel, and the role of black women as hired help in the South. How dependent is Natalie on the two women? In what way?
15. How might the repair of the elevator be a "sign of the times" for the Westcotts? What has been "stuck in the belly of the house?" What is now freed?

More question ideas for discussion:

The diaries and Silva and the Seminole baby/The Seminole War
The history of Gasparilla
Julia and her stair treads