

The Edge of Eden
by Helen Benedict
Reading Group Guide

1) *The Edge of Eden* explores the lives of Penelope and Rupert Weston, who grew up during World War II. They were evacuated from their homes and separated from their families in London to keep them safe from the bombs. This happened to many children in wartime Britain. What effects did this exile have on Penelope and Rupert when they became adults and tried marriage and parenthood?

2) Zara, the Weston's eldest child, is full of an almost sinister mischief, yet she is also poignant. Why is she drawn to magic and danger? What is she trying to do?

3) Do you find Zara ultimately sympathetic or not? Why?

4) At the beginning of the novel, Penelope seems at times spoiled and sulky. How does Benedict develop this character and how does Penelope change? Is there a point in the novel where your feelings about Penelope undergo a shift?

5) Rupert, the husband, also changes in the novel. What do you think his motivations are for the things he does? Is he sympathetic at all? Why or why not?

6) Marguerite Savy is another complex and intriguing character in *The Edge of Eden*. What are her motivations for indulging in magic? What does she want out of life?

7) Joelle Lagrenade seems as dangerous as she is beautiful. Are her motivations purely selfish, or is there an aspect to her that the reader can understand and sympathize with? If so, what is it and how does the writer show it?

8) Paul Leland, the American anthropologist, says he is studying Seychelles as a former slave colony. In which ways is the Seychelles' culture a legacy of slavery?