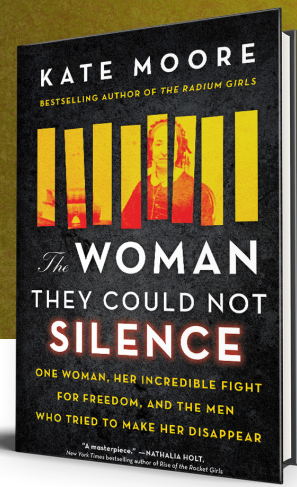


THE WOMAN THEY COULD NOT **SILENCE**

DISCUSSION GUIDE

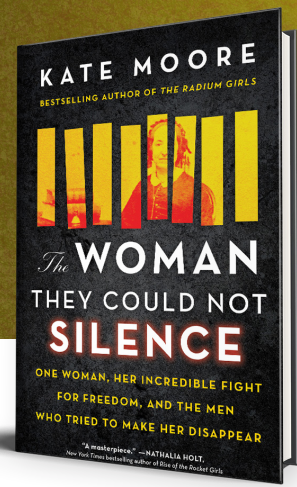


Young reader questions for
The Woman They Could Not Silence

1. This book is about a woman who was locked up in an insane asylum when she was not mad. How did Elizabeth respond to that situation? What techniques and approaches did she use to keep her sanity in the years that followed?
2. Elizabeth displays a lot of different qualities in her fight for freedom: resilience, courage, faith, creativity, leadership, patience, etc. Which do you think was the most important quality that ensured her eventual success and why? Have you ever demonstrated that quality in your life?
3. Author Kate Moore writes: “The nineteenth-century medical notes of supposed madwomen place particular emphasis on their appearance. An unbuttoned blouse, an undone bun, or even simple carelessness of dress was considered damning evidence a woman’s mind roamed free from its moorings.” Do you think assessing people’s appearances is a valid way to diagnose mental illness? And what did you think about the other historic medical ideas described in the book, such as physical surgery to “correct” mental illness and the idea that women were likely to go mad if they read books or had ambitions beyond being a wife? Do you think those ideas have long been abandoned by society or do they still persist today?
4. What did you think about the character of Theophilus Packard? Do you think he was a strong man or a weak man in the choices that he made?
5. Theophilus strove to control Elizabeth’s thoughts and beliefs. Today, many women find themselves in relationships where their partners try to control their dress, their friendships, their actions. Some men still think they have the right to control women. Why do you think this is still such a problem, 160 years on from Elizabeth’s experiences? What can we do to tackle it?

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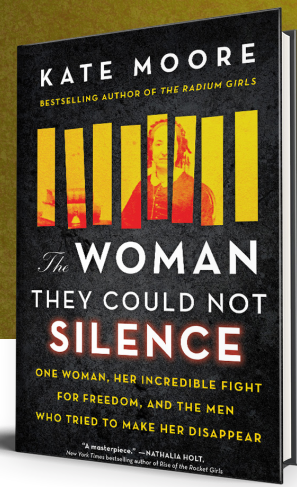
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6. Dr. McFarland is one of the villains in this story. Do you think he has any redeeming qualities?
7. Despite everything McFarland does to Elizabeth and her friends, Elizabeth keeps trusting the doctor. Why do you think she did that? What did you think about their complicated relationship?
8. Though *The Woman They Could Not Silence* is a nonfiction book, it is not like a textbook. Instead, it reads like a story, with the characters described in detail and their thoughts communicated through authentic first-person quotations sourced from historical records. How did this style of writing affect your feelings about Elizabeth and her experiences? Why do you think the author chose to write the book in this way? Did you like this approach to telling a true story from history or not?
9. The postscript of the book includes a modern-day example of an assertive woman having her sanity questioned when she dares to use her voice. Did these parallels between our world and Elizabeth's come as a shock, or had you already made these connections? Have you ever experienced or witnessed something like that happening in your own life?
10. In 2023, the state of Illinois changed the name of the McFarland Mental Health Center in Springfield, Illinois and named it after Elizabeth Packard instead. What do you think about that decision? Do you think it was the right thing to do? And how important are the names of the buildings that surround us? Do you know the stories behind the named buildings in your community?

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11. Elizabeth's story is a wonderful example of what you can achieve when you set your mind to it. She was determined to make the world a better place for women and the mentally ill through her campaigning, and she was effective in changing laws to protect their rights. What issue in the world would you want to fight for to make the world a better place? What might your first campaigning step be in that fight?

Springboard projects

- Choose an issue that you are concerned about and do something about it, e.g. start a petition, write to your representative, stage a protest, write an article, volunteer to help those affected, stage a fundraising event.
- Elizabeth found that writing a journal of her daily life in the asylum both helped her stay sane and created a record of the world she was witnessing. Keep a daily journal for a week of your world. You can choose what to write down. Will you record your feelings, the price of a milkshake, the color of the sky, political events, what you ate for lunch—or a mixture of all of these? Bonus project: research a journal by another figure from history and see what they chose to write down about their life.
- Kate Moore spent a lot of time in the book describing the asylum that Elizabeth had to stay in. Write your own description, build a model, or create a drawing of the asylum based on the details provided by the book.