

Discussion Questions for *Monique and the Mango Rains*

1. At what points in the story did you feel a connection to the people in Mali? Why?
2. What are the key themes or messages that you found in this book?
3. Do you agree with the following quote about Monique, written by the author? Why or why not? Do you find portions of it more important than others? Explain.

“Monique’s life was representative of that of so many women in one of the world’s poorest nations, yet she faced her challenges in extraordinary ways. She fought for her beliefs – birth control, the end of female genital cutting, the right to receive a salary, the right to educate her daughters. And she struggled to be with the man she loved. Her buoyant humor and willingness to defy tradition are an uplifting tribute to indomitable spirits everywhere. Monique was exceptional, a blend of the typical and the extraordinary. Her story is one of tragedy and joy, of tradition and rebellion, in an ancient culture in the midst of change.”

4. What do you know about childbirth in Mali now? What are the drawbacks and advantages to giving birth in Mali? What do you know of childbirth in the U.S.? How is it similar / different to what happens in Mali? How does your culture affect how you think about childbirth? Where would you rather give birth? Why?
5. How do you think Kris’ presence in the village affected Monique? How was Kris’ life changed by having known Monique? Have you ever known someone that well from another culture?
6. The title of the book is *Monique and the Mango Rains*. What did you learn about the weather in Monique’s part of Mali? Note especially the harmattan and the monsoon. How does it affect the lives of the villagers? What are the “mango rains” and how do they relate, metaphorically, to Monique’s life?
7. In many places in the text, there are references to the connections between the land and the people. People are described with adjectives / words pertaining to the earth and vice versa. For example, “the moon showed only a fingernail of light,” “the earth had gone five months with out a drink,” “darkened womb of mud,” “the air was pregnant with it,” “I longed for her to lie fallow... to gather back her strength.” What does this say about the culture? About how the society constructs our relationship with the earth?
8. Local customs and rituals are included throughout the book. Both the chickpea prophecy and the *yeleworo* prophecy come true. Why do you think the author included them? What are your views, now that you have read the book, about the importance of these rituals? About the reality behind them?
9. “Every act of development necessarily involves an act of destruction.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain. (Quote by George Appell, from *Cultural Anthropology*, Daniel G. Bates, Elliot M. Fratkin, 1999.) Do Americans and other foreigners have the right to intrude in another culture, bringing in their own values that may contradict traditional values?
10. Do you feel that certain values are universal and that all peoples should be encouraged to adopt them? Name some of these values. What did both Monique and Kris share as values that they worked hard to implement? Are some human rights inalienable? If so, what are these rights? (See the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on www.un.org/rights)
11. Do you believe that what unites us as humans is greater than what divides us?
12. Kris has said that Monique helped her to question her assumptions, to question any “prescribed way of doing things”? What do you think she meant by this?