

### Reader's Guide Questions for *A Walk Across the Sun*

1. The title of the novel comes from a poem that Thomas composes for Priya near the end of the story. What is Thomas attempting to express by writing the poem? What is the thematic significance of the title?
2. Sita and Ahalya are both named after characters in the *Ramayana*, the ancient Indian epic. How do the themes and characters of this classic tale and of the modern story told in the novel overlap? How do they differ?
3. In the early stages of the story, Thomas witnesses the kidnapping of Abby Davis. How does the kidnapping continue to shape his thoughts and actions throughout the book?
4. Sita begins the novel in the shadow of her older sister, envying many of Ahalya's attributes and relying on her for guidance and protection. Discuss some of the obvious, and not so obvious, ways in which Sita matures as the story progresses.
5. What does Thomas's troubled relationship with Tera Atwood tell the reader about him as a romantic partner? What does Thomas learn about himself from this relationship?
6. After Ahalya is rescued from Suchir's brothel and brought to the ashram in Andheri, Sister Ruth allows her to plant a flower of her choice. Ahalya selects a blue lotus. What is the symbolic significance of the lotus?
7. Both Thomas and Priya have complicated relationships with their fathers. How do these relationships influence their individual identities, their marital troubles, and their ultimate reunion?
8. In what ways is the sisters' middle-class upbringing a liability following the tsunami? In what ways is it a resource?
9. The role of gifts is significant in the novel. Ahalya gives Thomas a *rakhi* bracelet. Shyam gives Sita the Hanuman figurine. What do these gifts reveal about Ahalya and Sita? How do they shape their story?
10. Though influenced by many factors, the dissolution of Thomas and Priya's marriage is triggered by the death of their daughter, Mohini. How do Thomas's experiences in the story help him cope with that loss?
11. In the back of the van driving to Atlanta, Sita learns the story of Elsie, the runaway from Pittsburgh. After concluding her account of abuse, Elsie inquires about Sita's excellent command of English. Sita explains that the whole world speaks English, and Elsie replies with the exclamation: "That's because America is the best country on earth." Discuss the tensions implicit in this statement, especially given the circumstances under which it is made.

12. In what ways does Thomas's friendship with Dinesh shape Thomas's views on women and their treatment in India?
13. The cast of criminals in the novel is diverse—ethnically, socio-economically, and personally. What does this diversity reveal about the causes and complexities of the modern slave trade?
14. After taking Sita hostage and making demands of the FBI, Dietrich Klein asks Sita: "Do you know why you are here?" Answering his own question, he explains: "You are not here because I enjoy the sale of sex. You are here because men enjoy the purchase of it." Discuss the social and economic significance of this statement.
15. For much of the novel, the journeys of Sita and Ahalya are defined by tragedy and exploitation, yet the story concludes with a note of hope. What will the process of healing look like for them? As Thomas asks, will Sita ever want to marry a man after all that she has seen? Will Ahalya?