

Beneath the Sicilian Stars

Book Club Discussion Questions

Were you previously aware that Italians were interned and evacuated in the United States during this period? How did reading this novel change or deepen your understanding of World War II history?

The story follows the experiences of the Aiello family in California and the Cardinale family in Sicily. How does the narrative structure, alternating between these two locations and families, contribute to your understanding of the war's impact on both sides of the Atlantic?

Discuss Vincenzo Aiello's character arc. What does his experience reveal about what it meant to be an Italian immigrant in the U.S. during this time?

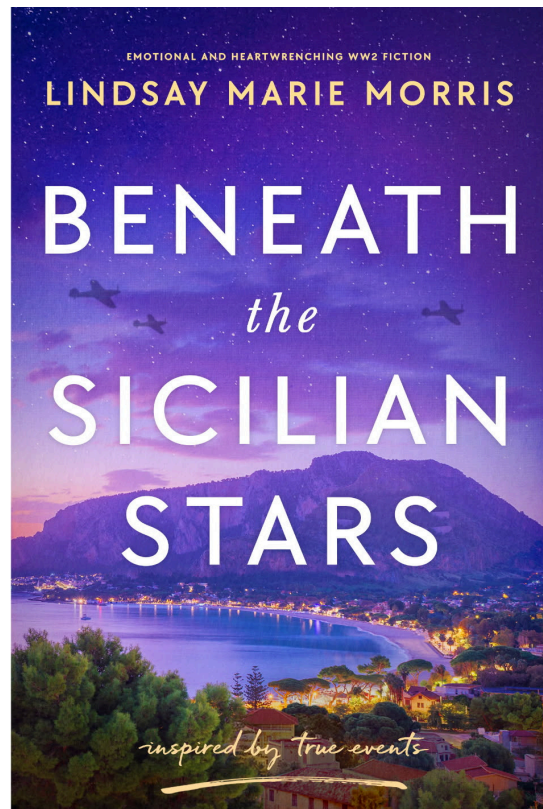
Annalisa Aiello navigates adolescence, cultural differences, and immense personal loss and hardship. How does her relationship with her parents evolve throughout the story? Discuss her journey toward independence and self-discovery.

Alberto Cardinale grows up in Sicily under Mussolini's regime. How do his early beliefs and experiences shape his perspective on Italy, the war, and his own future? How does his family's history influence his decision later in the novel?

The symbol of the fisherman's net appears multiple times in the story. What does it represent in the context of family, tradition, and resilience? Consider how characters are tied to or try to break free from this symbol.

Italians call Fort Missoula "Bella Vista." How does this name contrast with reality, and what does it suggest about perception and finding beauty or hope in challenging circumstances?

The novel features various instances of discrimination and prejudice against Italians. How do the characters react to these injustices, and what do their reactions reveal about their individual strengths and vulnerabilities?



How does the symbol of the *cornicello* (horn amulet) function within the narrative? What does it offer those who wear it?

At which point did you guess what the family secret was? How does the secret impact the Aiello and Cardinale families, both before and after its revelation? What are the consequences of keeping such secrets?

The novel explores different forms of patriotism and loyalty. How do characters like Vincenzo, Mario, and Alberto understand and express their loyalty to Italy and/or America?

The novel is deeply rooted in the experiences of Italian families across continents during a turbulent historical period. Discuss how the war and the specific historical events force the characters to confront, redefine, and potentially reconcile their identities, both as Italians and as Americans. How do these external pressures shape their relationships, particularly within the family structure?

How does knowing the story's historical basis affect your reading experience? Does it change your perception of the characters or events?

