RAINFOREST

MICHELLE PAVER · READING GUIDE

> **This guide gives away the ending.** Please finish the book first. *Rainforest* is a novel for adults: it includes violence, self-harm, drug-taking and the sexual abuse of children, along with the racist attitudes of its characters and their time, which Michelle addresses in her Author's Note.

Questions for discussion

1. *Rainforest* is told entirely through Simon's journal, and he begins it for his doctor. How far did you trust him? Can you point to the moment you stopped?

2. Simon says he won't write about Penelope, then writes about little else. What does the novel gain from a narrator who keeps revising his own story? How did you feel when he admitted what the talisman really is?

3. He is a scientist who insists on rational explanations. Does the book ever settle whether what haunts him is real, or could every event be explained by muktan, guilt and exhaustion? Which reading do you prefer?

4. Simon loves insects because their lives are logical and solitary. What do his feelings about mantids, wasps and moths tell you about the way he sees people, and women in particular?

5. Sarah Pinborough calls this a stalker story. At what point did you see Simon's "love" for what it was? Did the novel ever make you feel sorry for him, and were you comfortable with that?

6. "I was like a moth circling a nightlight, I mistook her for the moon." Is this an honest reckoning by the end, or one more way of making himself the centre of the story?

7. "Taking. Always taking." Fogging the ceibas, stealing the secret of muktan, the dig, the loggers, the black market in Maya art: how does the novel connect one man's obsession with what outsiders do to the forest and its people?

8. Michelle's Author's Note says the westerners' attitudes to the Yachikel reflect the early 1970s and not her own views. How did you experience reading a world through Simon's prejudices? What does J.C. allow you to see that Simon can't?

9. The jungle is at once sanctuary, laboratory, enemy and something close to God. Did your sense of it change as Simon's did? Compare the heat here with the Arctic of *Dark Matter* or the Himalayas of *Thin Air*, if you've read them.

10. The fairy tale of "The Grateful Animals" runs under the book, and Simon casts himself as a prince on a quest. Where does that story help him, and where does it betray him?

11. What is the price Simon pays in the cave, and what does he believe he has bought? Why do you think he is allowed to live?

12. In the final pages he says he is free, and keeps going back. Is this a happy ending? What do you think he is really hoping for?

More about the book, the jungle and the Maya at rainforest-book.co.uk