

These questions are intended to enhance your book group discussion of *The Art of Devotion* by Samantha Bruce-Benjamin.

*\*Please note that some of these questions reveal certain plot points that you may not wish to know before you have finished reading the novel.*

1. The opening lines of the novel suggest that “For each of us, there is a moment: What we see at the last, before God closes our eyes forever; an entire existence distilled to one perfect memory.” Do you agree with this sentiment? Discuss what each character’s “moment” might be. Discuss what yours might be.
2. There are four different narrators, and the novel switches viewpoints frequently. Who do you consider to be the most reliable narrator of the four women? Or are they all, to varying degrees, decidedly unreliable? How did your perception of their trustworthiness shift as the novel progressed?
3. With which character do you most identify? Why?
4. Adora “steals” Genevieve from Miranda and appears to mold the young girl in her image. Given what you know ultimately transpires and the rationale behind her seemingly manipulative and cruel decision, can Adora be forgiven? In the context of this act, is her choice barbaric or benevolent?
5. What does the character of Jack symbolize for Adora and what impels her immediate desire to never let him go? The subsequent relationship between Adora and Jack is ambiguous and its nature unclear. How do you perceive their bond? What role do you think each plays for the other? Contrast Adora’s relationships with Oliver and Sebastian to what she shares with Jack. What are the differences/similarities, if any, between them?
6. There are many recurring symbols in the novel: bougainvillea, the olive grove, the sea and the stray dogs. What does the bougainvillea signify to each character? What does the olive grove symbolize? Are the dogs symbolic within that context? Finally, what does Linford represent to Adora?
7. The role of the mother is one of the central themes of the novel, specifically the attributes that might define a “good” one. Discuss the notion of maternal guidance/sacrifice in relation to Sophie and Miranda. Are the decisions they make for their children justified or self-serving? Could it be argued that Adora, although barren, is actually the most selfless “mother” of them all?

8. Throughout the novel, Adora inspires a cross-section of emotions ranging from adoration to hatred, yet none of the characters appear able – or willing – to ignore her. Why is this? Beyond her beauty and wealth, what is it about Adora that proves so compelling to others, even those who despise her? Why can't anyone seem to escape her influence?
9. The ending of the novel challenges nearly everything the reader has been led to believe throughout the book. Were you surprised by what was revealed? In re-reading earlier passages, do you see any foreshadowing of what would ultimately transpire?
10. The nature of idolatry is at the heart of the novel, specifically Genevieve's desire to emulate Adora in everything. Given what happens, does Adora condemn Genevieve to an equally tragic life by indulging her in this whim? Or is Genevieve to blame and Adora merely an innocent victim of a crush that turned into a dangerous obsession?
11. Discuss the title, *The Art of Devotion*, as it applies to each character in the book. All make decisions that have profound, sometimes tragic, repercussions for themselves and others under the guise of "devotion." Examine the varying types of devotion each character displays.