

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Jahren's upbringing help determine her dedication to science? Consider her father's background as a science teacher and her mother's love of English literature.
2. One of the literary tropes Jahren uses in her memoir is the comparison of plant life with human life. Talk about the parallels she draws between her subjects and herself. In what ways are we all similar to our rooted, blossoming brethren? Do you see those parallels in your own life?
3. What do you find most remarkable in Jahren's descriptions of the wonders of the natural world? Consider, for instance, the sheer numbers of the plant world. Or how the willow tree clones itself...or the symbiotic relationship between trees and fungi...or the airborne signals of trees in their perennial war against insects.
4. Talk about Jahren's struggle with manic depression and how it has affected her life and work.
5. How would you describe Jahren's relationship with her lab partner Bill? What makes both professional and personal relationship work?
6. Describe some of the hardships that make life difficult for any scientist — bucking the status quo, the often endless waiting for results, the grunt work, or the scarcity of funding. Also, talk about the masculine culture Jahren faced as a woman scientist.
7. Will you ever take a tree—or any plant life—for granted again?