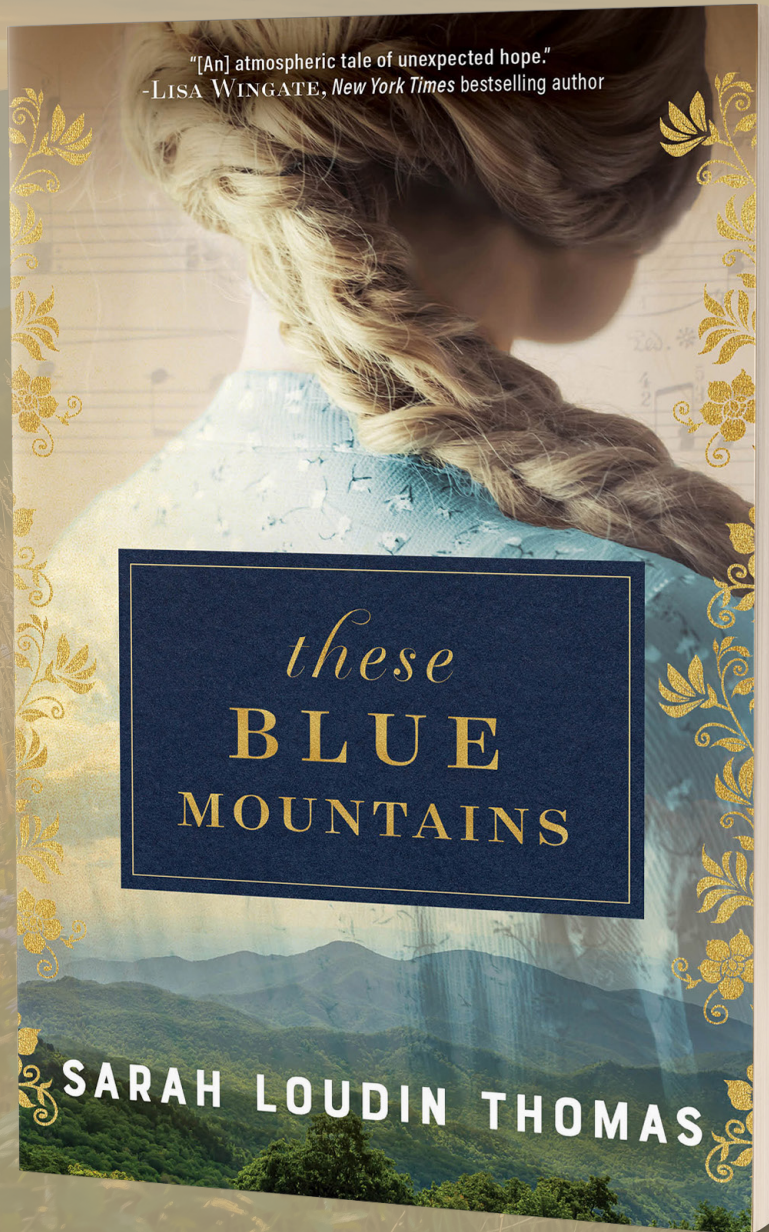


# THESE BLUE MOUNTAINS

## *Book Club Guide*





DEAR BOOK CLUB COORDINATOR,

While researching the western North Carolina flood of 1916, I stumbled across photos of a storybook Bavarian village constructed in large part from flood debris. That alone was astonishing, but when I learned the village was built by German civilians held prisoner during WWI, I simply had to dig deeper.

In my opinion, the best ideas for novels are rooted in fact. Like the fact that in 1933 Gerda Kostynski, a German woman, flipped open a copy of Berlin Radio Magazine and found herself staring at a photo of a cross with the name of her long-lost brother inscribed upon it. Richard Schlause, a German sailor, had reportedly died in an American prison in 1918. That's all Gerda knew. Thanks to a monument to men who died in a German enemy alien encampment in Hot Springs, NC, Richard's family finally learned his story.

You just can't make this stuff up. Although you can make up all sorts of things to go with it. Like making the long-lost brother a long-lost fiancé. Like sending a German woman who's grieved the loss of her love for fourteen years to America to try and recover his body. Like putting the body of a mysterious woman in the grave instead. Well, you can see why it's such fun to be a writer!

I hope you enjoy digging into Hedda's story as she tries to sort out her past as well as her future. If you'd like to know more about my research and inspiration for this story, I'm available to join book club discussions via Zoom. I love sharing details of the writing process as well as hearing what you think of the story as a reader. Just shoot me an email at [sarah@sarahloudinthomas.com](mailto:sarah@sarahloudinthomas.com) to make arrangements.

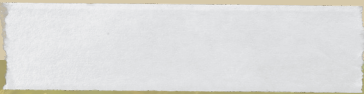
And until then, happy reading!

Best,

*Sarah Loudin Thomas*



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

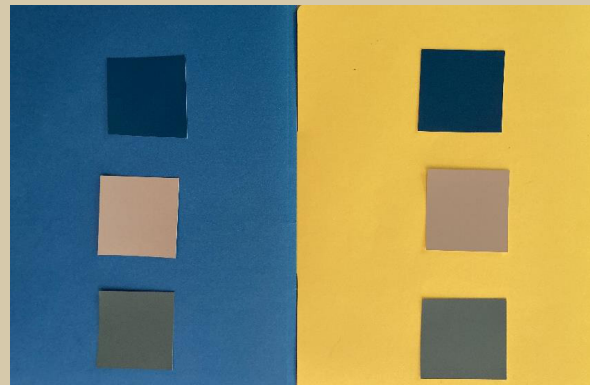
1. Hedda spent more than a decade holding onto the memory of her fiancé. Do you think she was right to wait for him? What effects, positive or negative, did you see it having on her life?
  2. When the warning signs related to Hitler's rise to power are first brought to Hedda's attention, she makes excuses. What ultimately causes her to see that all is not well in her country?
  3. Were you surprised to learn that there were German enemy alien camps in the United States? How do you feel about that piece of our history?
  4. It isn't safe for Fritz to return home for multiple reasons. Do you think he ultimately made the right decision?
  5. Garland hesitates to come clean about his part in Fritz's disappearance and the burial of a mysterious body. Was he wise to try and protect himself until he knew more? Or should he have confessed everything right away?
  6. Fritz's lifelong dream of being an artist is the thing that finally draws him back to western North Carolina. If you were going to pursue some form of art, what would it be and why?
  7. The story ends before the start of World War II. Knowing what's coming next, what sort of difficulties do you think Garland and Hedda will face? How has overcoming past adversity helped you face new challenges?
- 

## ONE COLOR BECOMES TWO

Josef & Anni Albers are historical figures who make an appearance in *These Blue Mountains*. Josef, a German professor at Black Mountain College, wrote the landmark work, "The Interaction of Color." Today, his presentation of color theory principles remains a classic tool for explaining color interaction. This simple activity invites you to experience that magic at home.

### Activity

1. Gather as many pieces of solid-colored paper as you can find. The easy way is with a pack of colored paper but you can also raid the recycling bin or your desk drawers.
2. Cut solid-colored squares or rectangles of paper at least 2"x2". Make sure you have two matching pieces of each color.
3. Gather larger, solid-colored items like full sheets of colored paper, t-shirts, napkins, etc. Again, make sure they're solid colors.
4. Lay two different colored items side by side on a flat surface. Select a pair of matching color squares and lay them in the center of each larger color block.
5. Focus on the dividing line between the two large color blocks and allow your peripheral vision to take in the two smaller squares. Does one seem darker and the other lighter? Or one more reflective and the other more matte?
6. Keep swapping out color squares to see which ones show the most significant change. Some of them really will magically appear to be two different colors!
7. For more fun with color, visit the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation website at <https://www.albersfoundation.org/learning/workshops>.





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