

## Reading Group Guide

### *The Coconut Latitudes – Secrets, Storms, and Survival in the Caribbean* by Rita M. Gardner

#### Discussion Questions

1. What made you want to read this book and suggest it for discussion?
2. What do you think motivated the author to share her life story? How did you respond to the author's "voice"?
3. What's the significance of the title?
4. Is this an end-of-era story about a family saga, or a story about Rita learning to love her family and herself, despite traumatic events?
5. Discuss the importance of place in this memoir. How does the author use the contrast of life in the Dominican Republic and life in America?
6. One of the questions this book asks is about the importance of truth and honesty in family relationships, and about acceptance and forgiveness, especially in the relationship to self. Discuss the way this is explored in the memoir.
7. In what ways are different kinds of love helping the author reflect on her life—her tie with her sister, mother and father, before and after their deaths? Her dog in childhood, and the quality of friendship as a teen? Her love of art and travel and writing?
8. How does the relationship with her family change on her last visit home?
9. What do you think most inspires the author's final reckoning with family events when she visits the place of her childhood? Her age, the need to let the past and its mysteries go, her role as survivor and keeper of secrets? How is her decision-making process different in later life than in her early 20s?
10. The shared love for the Dominican Republic childhood binds the author and her sister. Do you think that the need to know the secret about the disappearance limits their relationship as adult siblings?
11. Discuss how the need for a creative and authentic life leads the author to the life transition central to her memoir. What other life events do you think form or sustain a person's sense of meaning in adult life, when marked by a childhood trauma?
12. Do you think the author tried to elicit a specific response from the reader? Did your view of characters change as you read the book?
13. Discuss the book's structure and the author's use of language and writing style. How does the author draw the reader in and keep the reader engaged? Does the author convey her story with insight, acceptance, self-pity, or something else?
14. Compare this book to other memoirs your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?

