

# Kylie's Ark: The Making of a Veterinarian

## BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

### “Gunnison Beach”

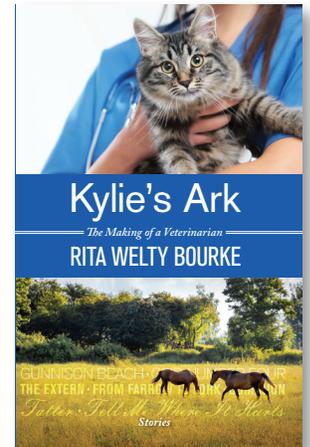
1. Kylie objects to being called “love” and “little girlie” by the gay man, but she seems to take pride in being called a “Park Service Bitch.” Why the discrepancy?
2. What comparison does the author draw between how we treat animals and how we treat people who are marginalized by society?
3. At the end of the story, Kylie says of the gay nudist, “There isn’t much I can do. Except not make things worse for him. Maybe touch his arm when I leave” (22). Now consider her internship. Does Kylie gain more for her naturalist cause through her actions in the story or through inaction?

### “Grid Number Four”

1. Consider the hermit’s and Kylie’s long winter. What does the story reveal about solitude?
2. Andy and Kylie disagree fundamentally on whether animals should be sacrificed for the sake of science. Can a good relationship be based on such a chasm of philosophy?
3. What is the most important lesson Kylie learns during her internship which will help her later as a veterinarian?
4. Kylie’s job as a trapper aids Stephan in his job of euthanasia. Do you think her means justify the end, or will she always feel guilty about her role in this research?
5. Where do you see cruelty in this story? Does it come from scientific research on animals or from nature itself?

### “The Extern”

1. Kylie says, “I wonder if the decisions we make in the night are the same as what we make in the daytime. Maybe we should revisit those decisions in the morning because they were made when it was dark and we were afraid” (74). Have you ever faced a decision that had to be made during the chaos and confusion of night?
2. How successful is Kylie in managing the various egos at Bryant Equine Hospital? What presents more of a challenge—her gender or her youth and inexperience?
3. What different lesson does each of the three veterinarians—Dr. Bryant, Dr. Rocco, Dr. Sutherland—teach Kylie?



KYLIE'S ARK  
THE MAKING OF A VETERINARIAN  
by Rita Welty Bourke  
Published by Lansinger Press  
Release Date: April 1, 2016

*Paperback available from Amazon.com. eBook available from Amazon.com, iTunes, and ritaweltybourke.com.*

4. Kylie says of the mare who will be euthanized tomorrow, “There isn’t much I can do for her except what I promised: clean straw, fresh water, hay and a bit of grain if she wants it. And I can groom her; brush her face with a soft-bristled brush” (99). The language is similar to Kylie’s last scene with the nudist in “Gunnison Beach” on page 22. What does this similarity reveal about Kylie as a character?

5. Javiero takes a significant risk with his career by standing up to Dr. Rocco. What do you think will be the outcome for Javiero? Would you have taken the same risk?

## “From Farrow to Fork”

1. What strength does Kylie bring to the male-dominated world of veterinary medicine in Texas?

2. Kylie says, “If we help the animals, that’s only accidental. Our real goal is to make sure the humans who come in contact with them don’t get sick. That’s a problem for me” (111). In your own professional experience, is there ever conflict between your goals and the goals of the organization you serve? Which is the higher obligation?

3. Does Kylie’s grandfather’s experience with undulant fever have anything to do with her choice thirty years later to become a vet? What about her carelessness with the live vaccine?

4. What similarities exist between Kylie and Charlie? Are they both on the outside looking in, or the inside looking out?

## “Dominion”

1. Kylie recalls the Veterinarian’s Oath when she meets the Amish farmer. Is a vet’s oath meaningful if the owner’s word is always final?

2. The title “Dominion” refers to the Amish belief that man holds dominion over the animals of the earth, and so it is with Hostetler and his horse. How does the title also apply to Kylie’s night in the Cape Fear River Valley?

3. In this story, Kylie describes an ideal veterinary practice. Is she too idealistic, or is she right to search for the perfect job?

## “Tatter: (v) to make ragged”

1. Kylie is haunted by her classmate from Texas A&M who did everything to save her horse, despite its being a “hopeless case” (157). By the end of this story, do you think Kylie approves of Drucie’s extreme measures? Do you?

2. Kylie faces tremendous guilt in this story after euthanizing Tatter. Did she make the right decision for the cat? For the owner? For herself?

3. Will Kylie ever come to terms with her decision?

## “Tell Me Where It Hurts”

1. If only animals could talk. What aspects of a veterinarian’s job are more difficult than an MD’s job? What aspects are easier?

2. In this story, the author presents a series of vignettes as Kylie encounters various cats and dogs in her new practice. Is there an image or story you’ll never forget?

3. Kylie is learning “You can’t be a bleeding heart for every poor son-of-a-bitch who walks through the door. You can’t save every animal that comes to you” (182). Is being a vet more about handling animals or handling people?

4. Kylie concludes at the end of the book, “If I ever stop hurting, if I ever get to the point where it’s just a job, if I begin to think the lives of these creatures are worthless, their pain of no consequence, I’ll give it up. I won’t be a vet anymore. I’ll look for some other line of work” (206). What do you think Kylie’s future holds? Will the heartbreaks of this profession become too much, or will she find a way to persevere?

5. Could you be a vet?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RITA WELTY BOURKE has published over forty works of fiction and nonfiction in literary magazines including the *North American Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Shenandoah*, *Witness*, and the *Black Warrior Review*. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee. Learn more at [www.ritaweltybourke.com](http://www.ritaweltybourke.com).

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