

ALPHA SIGMA ALPHA ALUMNAE BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
DECEMBER 2020 – “THE GREAT ALONE” BY KRISTIN HANNAH

1. What was your favorite moment during *The Great Alone* and why?
2. The community of Kaneq is a close-knit one with everyone looking out for each other. What did you think of the support that Large Marge, Tom Walker, and other community members provided to the Allbright's from the moment they arrived? Would you like to live in such a small but supportive environment?
3. Let's discuss the complexities of Ernt as a character. Ernt is physically abusive and shows strong symptoms of both posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and alcoholism. Were you quick to think of Ernt as a bad person, or did you think of him as someone with many layers that led him to the man he became? Do you believe he loved Cora and Leni? Why or why not?
4. Cora is a complicated character. When Leni is reminiscing about her mother and their days in the commune, she notes that "her mother changed her personality just enough to fit in." What do you think this passage tells us about Cora? Why do you think she stayed with Ernt all those years? Was it love, fear, or something else that kept her from leaving? Why didn't she press charges when she had the chance?
5. Leni and Matthew experience first friendship and first love. There is an obvious Romeo-and-Juliet aspect to their love story. How did you feel about their relationship as it was growing? Did you root for them, or did you feel that Leni was taking a terrible risk that was going to have dark consequences?
6. This novel shows a place on the brink of change. Tom Walker believes that progress and more development is key, whereas people like Ernt doesn't want anything to change. Why do you think people are so resistant to change? Do you believe this also applies to certain communities today?
7. Did you see Cora's explosive act of protection coming? What did it feel like to read that scene? As a parent, do you think you'd be capable of the same act, or write such a confessional letter?
8. Did you hold Leni responsible in your mind for any of Matthew's misfortune? Why or why not? Did you anticipate the kind of future that is set in motion for them at the close of the book?
9. At the end of the story, Leni ends up back in Alaska—do you think there's an ultimate place where people belong? How would you know if you got there?
10. What are your thoughts about the homesteading aspect of *The Great Alone*? Could you live without running water? Would our environment be better off if more people homesteaded? What aspects of homesteading would you be willing to apply to your own life?
11. "The wild, spectacular beauty of Alaska. It was otherworldly somehow, magical in its vast expanse, an incomparable landscape of soaring glacier-filled white mountains that ran the length of the horizon, knife-tip points pressed high into a cloudless, cornflower blue sky." (page 22) The author describes the Alaskan landscape with such electric language—what passages did you find the most moving? Did they help you visualize the place or inspire you? Did you find the landscape to be in contrast to the violence of the story? Or do you think it complemented the breathtaking feeling of young love? Have you ever been to Alaska? If not, do you have any desire to go?