



Reading between the Lions

The Art Institute's Book Club

www.artic.edu/bookclub

DISCUSSION GUIDE

How to Live: A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer

1. Montaigne lived in a time of violent religious intolerance and terrifying natural catastrophes. Discuss how Sarah Bakewell positions Montaigne as an author and thinker who speaks to present-day conflict and disasters.
2. Montaigne's work has been adapted for use by different groups and causes over the centuries. Does his philosophy seem useful to contemporary political factions? If so, which factions, and why? How would Montaigne likely feel about being put to these purposes?
3. How does Montaigne's relationship with La Boetie inform the structure of the book? How has Sarah Bakewell used the facts of Montaigne's life to propose a new interpretation of his writings?
4. Would Montaigne be a good citizen, living a good life, by modern standards? Why or why not?
5. Montaigne lived in the period immediately following the era illustrated by *Kings, Queen, and Courtiers*. Do works in the exhibition foreshadow the issues that dominated Montaigne's lifetime?
6. How is Italy's cultural dominance reflected in the exhibition? How about in the story of Montaigne's travels? Does Italy—and Rome, in particular—have a similar effect on the traveler of today?
7. How does Montaigne's experience as mayor resonate with the role of the public servant in the United States today?
8. Has Montaigne's wife been treated fairly by posterity? By Sarah Bakewell? What about Marie de Gournay? Does Bakewell bring her to life?