



Discussion Questions

The World Without Us by Alan Weisman

Source: Madison Public Library

1. Weisman's reasons for probing the idea of a 'world without us' are unstated. Why do you suppose he didn't offer an introductory chapter, or even paragraph, on his reasons for exploring this idea?
2. Do you agree with Weisman that a way to understand how the world may evolve without us is to picture how the world was like before us? It seems some of the scientists interviewed believe the earth will actually change in new, heretofore unseen ways in a world without us, rather than return to a pre-human state. (For example, the Spanish conservation biologist who studies reefs and oceans seems to believe that.) Were there other compelling concepts in the book of a new earth that could emerge in part because of our presence, then disappearance?
3. Some reviewers have found in *The World Without Us* doomsday plotlines (New York Times & others), while another (New York Times Book Review) called it the equivalent of a "Hollywood-worthy, slow-motion disaster spectacular and feel-good movie rolled into one." What was your emotional connection to the book? Did you find its tone depressing all the time? Some of the time? Not at all?
4. While some of the worst ecological damage is known to us all (Chernobyl, for example) some examples here were surprising. Which of his discoveries of damaging products were unknown or most shocking to you? Plastic pellets from skin exfoliants on the beach? By-products from embalming? The chemicals used in Kenya's cut-flower industry? Others?
5. Living in Wisconsin, were you surprising to read of the history of large mammals in North America? Were you aware of the giant sloth, for example? Did the idea of repopulating North America with large carnivorous mammals intrigue you? What about his supposition that the continued existence of large mammals in Africa is the result of their evolving simultaneously (and in close proximity to) human evolution?

Madison Public Library

A Member of the South Central Library System

www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/bookclubs/

6. Did you view this as a fantasy tome? In an interview with Powell's bookstore, Weisman says that he "wanted to write something that people would read, and read all the way through.... I hoped people would be entertained by it, or at least captivated by it." Were you distanced from reality while reading it?

7. What do you think of Weisman's 'one child per human mother' policy? Do you think it is in our future? Did this book make you think differently about our collective future?