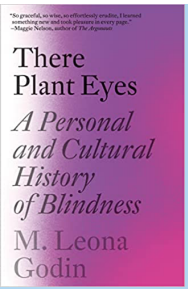
Discussion Guide



There Plant Eyes
M Leona Godin

Vintage
2022
352 pages
ISBN: 978-1984898401

Eyes and Vision
Disability Health

Summary

A vivid personal and cultural history, There Plant Eyes explores the fascinating history of blindness—from Homer to Helen Keller, from Dune to Stevie Wonder, and from the invention of braille to the science of echolocation. And in doing so, Godin reveals just how essential blindness and vision are to our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Questions

1. Godin begins this sweeping narrative with some personal history. How does the introductory chapter, “Seeing and Not-Seeing” lay the groundwork for the chapters to come?
2. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the blind poet/prophet of ancient Greece. Why do you think Godin chose to begin with these ancient texts? Were you persuaded that misconceptions surrounding blindness stretch back so far?
3. Throughout the book, Godin weaves personal anecdotes with her larger cultural themes of blindness through the centuries. Did you find these anecdotes useful? Did they help you to relate the older or more obscure texts to today?
4. What does the term “ocularcentrism” mean? How does it relate to the larger themes of the book?
5. Where does the title come from? What does it mean and what’s its significance?
6. The reader is often addressed directly in the book. Do you think this refers to a blind or sighted reader? What makes you choose one or the other? Do you think the message of the book is the same for blind and sighted readers?
7. Discuss your own experience of knowing, meeting, or encountering a blind person, or of experiencing temporary or permanent blindness yourself.
8. *There Plant Eyes* gives many examples of the metaphoric extremes of being either poets/prophets or superheroes on the one hand and being beggars and buffoons on the other. How do these extremes impact the lives of actual blind people?
9. Blindness is often depicted as a calamity. Do you think this attitude shapes the way you personally deal with blindness or blind people? Why are our representations of blind people in the media so wrong? Do you think *There Plant Eyes* will change the way you perceive blind characters in books or movies? Why or why not?
10. In chapters 8 and 9, Godin explores the history of blind education and how it was intimately connected with larger European ideals of progress and enlightenment. What did you find interesting or surprising about this history?

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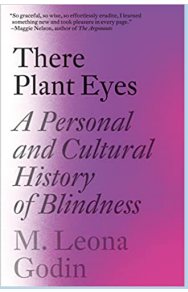

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11. Godin writes: “There are as many ways of being blind as there are of being sighted” (272-3). How did reading *There Plant Eyes* complicate your idea of what blindness is? Did you learn anything surprising about what or how blind people see?
12. A common thread in the book is that “impressions about blindness . . . are far more threatening to blind people than the blindness itself.” As sonar expert Daniel Kish, puts it on page 169. What do you think about that proposition? What can you personally do to shift negative impressions of blindness? What can society do?
13. Were you familiar with the term “inspiration porn”? Have you encountered such depictions in the media? Why are they so detrimental to the lives of blind and disabled people?
14. How does *There Plant Eyes* relate blindness to larger issues facing disabled people? Had you ever heard of disability pride? What do you think of the disability pride movement? Can you relate it to other pride movements?
15. *There Plant Eyes* provides insights into the ableism and discrimination blind people face in their careers, personal lives, and artistic ambitions. How do you think gender, race, and sexuality intersect with blindness and other disabilities?
16. In the book’s closing chapter, what truths about blindness were distilled as we look ahead to a future that is less ableist, less ocularcentric? Do you think blind pride is possible?
17. In the final chapter, Godin discusses problems of language. Do you agree with her that language matters? Does her argument inspire you to change the way you employ the word “blind” or to be more sensitive to ableist language in general?
18. What is original about There Plant Eyes? How does it distinguish itself from other books you have read on blindness or disability?
19. Godin quotes many blind people in *There Plant Eyes*. Whose story were you most curious about? Are there people whose memoirs or biographies you now feel inspired to read?

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