

Discussion Guide for **STORM DOG**

Written by L.M. Elliott



About the Author

New York Times bestselling author L. M. Elliott was a long-time magazine journalist, covering women's issues, the arts, and medical narratives before turning to historical and biographical fiction. Her works include *HAMILTON AND PEGGY: A REVOLUTIONARY FRIENDSHIP*, *UNDER A WARTORN SKY*, *A TROUBLED PEACE*, *ACROSS A WAR-TOSSED SEA*, *SUSPECT RED*, *DA VINCI'S TIGER*, and *GIVE ME LIBERTY*. *STORM DOG* is her first contemporary novel.

Elliott holds a BA from Wake Forest University and a Masters in journalism from UNC-Chapel Hill. She is a lifelong Virginia resident, history-lover, and rescue dog devotee. Learn more at www.lmelliott.com

About the Book

Whip-smart Ariel doesn't fit in. Only in the winds of the Blue Ridge Mountains and spring storms that mirror the storms in her heart does she really feel at home.

Her brother understands her, but he's in Afghanistan. Her father hasn't been the same since George deployed. Her mother focuses on Ariel's gorgeous sister. When Gloria is selected to be an Apple Blossom Parade princess, Ariel feels even more the outsider and takes to the hills.

There, during a raging storm, Ariel finds a lost dog. Amid soul-rattling thunder and lightning, he leads her to the safety of a cabin and Sergeant Josie, a former Army K-9 handler. Together—with music, dog dancing, and a storm-child-crazy plan—the three outcasts find themselves.

Discussion Questions

1. **“When everyone expects you to become a screwup, it’s hard to avoid becoming one.”** (Ariel, pg 5) Are the expectations put on Ariel fair or unfair? Who is putting those expectations on her? Why does she believe she doesn’t fit in? Is she right?
2. **How do Ariel’s relationships in her family change over the course of the book?** Why do they improve? Is there someone in your family you struggle to understand? How do members of Ariel’s family change during the novel?
3. **What does “crashing the parade” represent to Ariel?** Why is it so important to her? Have you ever struggled to win the attention of family or friends or felt competitive with siblings? Ever tried to steal someone’s spotlight? Why? How did it make you feel?
4. **“Music would set Duke free of fear and elevate my soul out of nobodyhood.”** (Ariel, pg 73) Many characters in *Storm Dog* have a special emotional connection to music. Ariel’s brother, for instance, says it makes him feel “invulnerable.” (George, pg. 24) What are your favorite songs or artists? Why are they special to you? Are any songs on Ariel’s playlist on yours too?
5. **“Now that I’ve imagined and created my own melody, people mistakenly labeling me just doesn’t hurt as much. I know who I am.”** (Ariel, pg 223) Eventually, Ariel discovers her own sense of self. What gives her that new confidence and self-definition? What does she learn about herself over the course of the book?
6. **“Know what I’ve learned may be the most important thing in the world? Sticking by your buddies.”** (Sergeant Josie, pg 145). What does it mean to be a good friend? Which characters offer Ariel the truest and strongest friendship? Are they similar to or different from your friends? How?
7. **“Think because I live in a trailer park and not some old fancy house like yours that I can’t have good manners?”** (Marcus, pg 112) Throughout *Storm Dog*, Ariel is constantly meeting people who defy her expectations of what they “should” be like. Which character surprised you the most? Why? What had you assumed about them?
8. **“You’d completely miss that dull-looking, all-gray catbird’s improvisational magic...if all you thought about was his appearance.”** (Ariel, pg 129) How do different characters in *Storm Dog* think about, value, and define “beauty?” Do you agree or disagree?
9. **“I’d never imagined my little moment of flight could nudge others into testing their wings.”** (Ariel, page 203) What is the importance of creativity and imagination, self-expression, and live ensemble performance in *Storm Dog*? How does it transform the characters?
10. **Throughout the book, Ariel and Duke learn from each other.** What does Duke teach Ariel? Have you ever learned something about life—or yourself—from a pet or animal?
11. **Ariel also finds solace and redemption in Nature**, saying, “Everyone should be able to find hope in the world waking up and preening after a storm.” (Ariel, pg. 24) Do you have favorite outdoor places, activities, or memories? How do they make you feel?