

MAKIN' MIRACLES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Zola Devon has an unusual gift as a seer, often receiving messages or words from God for others. Remembering the first chapter of the book, how would you feel if you were shopping in Nature's Corner and Zola offered one of her messages to you? Stories of individuals with gifts like Zola's abound in Biblical and other faith-based stories, but they don't occur as commonly in our world today. Why do you think this is? Do you think it was hard for Zola to be obedient to give the words to others she felt God wanted her to share?

2. Spencer Jackson first met Zola in her shop Nature's Corner. What happened at that meeting? They met the second time at the hut at Raven's Den. What happened at this encounter? How were the two meetings different? How did these early interactions highlight some of the differences between Spencer and Zola?

3. What did you think about Spencer's business colleague Leena Evanston? Why was Spencer so drawn to her? Why was he reluctant to contact the police or prosecute her after she tried to rob him? What would you have done in a similar situation?

4. Spencer has a strained relationship with his brother Bowden. What things in the past happened to foster the problems between the two brothers? Spencer has also not been close to any of his family for years. What caused these breaches? Do you have any strained relationships with your family members? Why do you think problems with close family members are often the most difficult to resolve?

5. Why is the hut at Raven's Den important to Zola? Why didn't Spencer tear down the hut when he built his home on the mountain? Later in the book, as a reader, you visit Spencer's childhood memory spot and Zola's island hut in Tahiti. Zola told Spencer: "A person needs a place where they can go to find peace and get collected in their soul." Do you think this is true? Do you have a special place where you go to find peace or did you have one as a child?

6. Zola Devon is both Tahitian and American, and she has spent parts of her life in both places. How does this multi-cultural background make her unusual? Was she always comfortable with the aspects of herself that made her different from others? Zola tells Spencer at one point: "The world is not always kind to non-conformists, to those who are different." Do you think that is true? How has Zola found ways to be more comfortable in her own skin and to accept herself as the unique person she is? How has Spencer fought some of these same battles in being different?

7. Animals can often play an important part in our lives. How did Spencer get his dog Zeke? And how are they bonded as owner and pet? How did Zola get her cat Posey? What was Posey's story? Both pets played sweet roles as companions and comforts to their owners. Do you have pets that are meaningful like this in your life?

8. What did you think about Zola's grandparents Nana Etta and Papa Vern? How did they influence Zola's life positively? Are you a part of a big, extended family like the Devon's? What aspects of their family life seemed similar to yours? How did Zola's family contrast with Spencer's in interacting together, sharing in a dinner or family event, and in caring for one another?

9. What kind of photographer is Spencer Jackson? How did he become a photographer and what brought him to Gatlinburg to open the Jackson Gallery? Why didn't he choose to work in his family's photography business?

10. Good friends enrich our lives. Rachel and Maya are two of Zola's friends. How did these friendships develop and how is Zola's friendship different with each woman? How did Spencer meet Aston Parker? What factors drew them together? In what ways do Spencer's and Zola's friends help and support them in the story? Which of your friends are especially meaningful in your life? Do you have close bonds with friends of other races or cultures like Zola and Spencer did?

11. Zola's and Spencer's relationship hits many snags as it struggles to develop. What problems hinder their relationship? What things about Zola most worry Spencer? What things about Spencer trouble Zola the most? What events occur that bring resolution to these problems and finally bring the couple together at the end?

12. Two serious problems evolve for Zola in this story in relation to her gift as a seer. The first is with Madame Renee and the second is with the missing daughter of Benwen Lee. What causes difficulties for Zola in both of these situations? How do both come to a head before the book closes and how are they resolved? What did Zola learn about what happened to Ben's daughter Seng Ryon Chen? How and in what way did learning this knowledge frighten Zola?

13. Why did Aldo Toomey throw a smoke bomb into Zola's store? What things happened in his life that led up to this event? Why didn't Zola press charges? How does Aldo later take revenge on Madame Renee?

14. How does Spencer gain the opportunity to photo shoot the hoarfrost on the mountain? What new respect does Zola find in watching Spencer work in this situation and what new appreciation for Zola does Spencer gain from this day? On another photo outing together, Spencer lends a hand to help Zola find a lost child. What happens in this situation? How does finding Eddie bond the couple in a new way?

15. At the waterfall on Buckner Branch, Zola helps Spencer give up and release some of his past hurts and pain. She has him throw pebbles into the water, remembering the sorrows or sins he wants to be free of. What did you think about this scene? How did this time help bring a cleansing and new lightness to Spencer? What criticisms did Zola's grandmother have about it afterwards?

16. Spencer and Zola enjoy many happy times outdoors, both loving and delighting in nature. They share a happy day with Spencer photographing frogs, spiders, and scenes around the farm. Another day Spencer takes Zola with him to hike and photograph outdoor vistas on top of the Smoky Mountains near Mount Buckley. What happened to spoil that day and brought Spencer's and Zola's relationship to a turning point?

17. When Spencer finally goes home for his parents' anniversary, taking Zola with him, what happens at that family gathering? What did Zola see about Spencer's family on her visit? Did you like Spencer's family? What does Spencer learn and realize about Geneva that he didn't know before? How did this free him and yet make him angry at the same time? What did you think about how Spencer's family kept truths from him?

18. Why does Zola go home to Moorea unexpectedly near the end of the book? What is troubling her that drives her home? How does her father help her? What causes Spencer to follow Zola to Moorea and how does the story end?