

A Rebellious Woman

Discussion Questions

1. Overall, what do you think of Belle? Do you admire her? Disapprove of her? At what places in the book do you have these (or other) feelings?
2. What are some adjectives you would use to describe Belle?
3. How would you describe Eliza?
4. How would you describe the relationship between Belle and Eliza? What bothers or surprises you? How does their relationship change over time?
5. What do you think are Eliza's reasons for protecting Belle?
6. Take a look at the Etiquette Rules at the beginning of the book. Which ones surprise you the most? Why do you think there were so many rules about women's behavior?
7. How does Belle respond to these restrictions? How does that affect how you view her?
8. How would you have dealt with the limits that were placed on women in this time period?
9. How do these rules compare with what you know about how women are still controlled in certain sects/religions, both in America and abroad?
10. How do these rules compare with the types of restrictions the typical woman faces in American society today?
11. Belle was a product of her Southern upbringing. If she had been born in the North, do you think she would have been an Abolitionist?
12. How would you describe Belle as a wife and mother?
13. Why do you think Belle was reluctant to marry again after her divorce from Sam Hardinge? Was this a smart decision?

14. How would you describe Belle's relationships with each of her husbands? Why do you think she chose them?
15. How would you describe Eliza's and Sam's relationship?
16. When they are together, Sam has his own name for Eliza. What does this tell the reader?
17. What do you think led Belle to lose her sanity and end up in an asylum?
18. There is no record that Belle ever threatened to sell Eliza or her family, but most of the events in the book really happened. What real event surprised you the most?
19. Census records from 1880 show Eliza and Sam still in Martinsburg and living in a house they rented from Eliza's brother. Do you think Eliza is satisfied with how her life turns out?
20. Do you think Belle is satisfied with how her life turns out? Would she say she lived her life "exactly as she chose"? Do you think she has any regrets?
21. In the course of the book, Eliza and her family prosper, and Belle's fortunes decline. This is a historical fact. Did this part of Belle's and Eliza's story surprise you? Do you think it's an important aspect of their story? What does it teach us about our understanding of history?
22. How does Belle change throughout the book? How do your feelings about her change?
23. Do you think Belle deserves the reader's respect? Why or why not?
24. As I was writing *A Rebellious Woman*, one of the themes that emerged was freedom. What different aspects of freedom are explored in the book?