**Reading Group Guide**

These discussion questions are designed to enhance your group’s conversation about *God is an Astronaut*.

**About the book**

*God is an Astronaut* is a novel shaped just as much by words left unsaid as it is by those on the page. In the wake of the Titan’s crash, we see the carefully crafted story Spaceco is feeding to the public unravel; we see Liam’s resolve to keep his secrets to himself; we see Jessica grappling with how to talk to her children, colleagues, and neighbors; and we see one side of an email exchange fraught with years of illicit affection. And underscoring it all is the majesty of the sky, somehow still unattainable, and the wonders of the natural world, fecund and wild. Imaginative and lyrical, *God is an Astronaut* is a love story, an ode to wonder, and an elegy for all that is lost along the way.

**For discussion**

1. *God is an Astronaut* is an epistolary novel. How does this form shape your understanding of the characters and plot? Why do you think Foster only included Jessica’s side of the correspondence? How does Arthur’s character take shape through his unseen responses to Jessica’s emails?
2. In the beginning of the novel, Jessica tells Arthur that she’s building her greenhouse because she wants “to put something in the place of nothing” (5). How does that desire relate to Liam’s work with Spaceco? What are the similarities between Liam’s relationship with outer space and Jessica’s relationship with plants? What are the differences?
3. There is a constant thread through the novel comparing astronauts and space travel to the divine. Where do each of the characters, primarily a group of scientists and mathematicians, look to find a higher order? What do they believe in? Why do you think Foster chose the title *God is an Astronaut* to represent this story?
4. On page 75, Jessica says, regarding the documentation of endangered or vulnerable species, “We can all take pictures of *Prasophyllum* and the cheetahs, and Jack and Corinne can show them to their children, and they’ll remember us as the people who lovingly, painstakingly documented our way of life into a myth.” Where do you see this idea come up in the novel? Who are the documenters, and what seems to be motivating them?
5. Jessica describes Spaceco as a “reckless extravagance” (165) to test your luck in such an obviously dangerous way. Does she think that Spaceco’s work is frivolous? Do you? Why or why not?
6. Spaceco’s actions after the crash all seem to be motivated by their desire to control the story. Does that notion, which comes up so often in the wake of a public catastrophe, seem foolish or dated? How effective are Spaceco’s attempts to do this?
7. Compare Liam’s work to Arthur’s. While Liam is forever focused on the sky and Arthur on the land, they are both men of numbers, and they are both deeply immersed in studying a form of destruction. Do you see any other shared themes in their work? Why is Arthur so critical of Liam? How does Jessica view their respective projects? Do they ever merge in her mind?
8. What is “the power, the deep visceral allure, of spectacle” (131)? How does it both help and hurt Spaceco? Can it really be harnessed?
9. According to Lacroix, our obligations to one another are “to be witnesses to one another, to think about how we exist in this world. To try to squeeze out a little bit of the fucking truth” (169). Do you agree with him? Do you think we have other obligations to one another? What do the other characters in the novel think of this?
10. As she’s coming to terms with Arthur’s move to North Carolina and her own decision to go into space, Jessica writes an email juxtaposing the tree climbing competition she and Jack had that day with one she and Arthur once had that led to their affair. Beyond the shared activity, how are her feelings during those two events similar? And different? On an emotional level, how does her affair compare to her decision to go into space?
11. What do you think of Jessica’s decision to go into space? Is it irresponsible? Why do you think she decides to go? What do you make of Jack’s and Corinne’s very different responses to her decision? If you were her, would you go?
12. As Jessica, Elle, and Lacroix prepare to go up in space, they learn that the Spaceco spacesuits are superfluous, an illusion provided for clients looking for the most authentic outer space experience possible. With that thought in mind, do you see the Spaceco tragedy in a new light? What do you think of the idea that there’s an authentic space travel experience?
13. Spaceco passengers are advised to wear long underwear under their spacesuits because, even in a climate-controlled cabin, the relentless darkness of space makes people feel cold. How does light affect the different characters in the novel? Who, in particular, seems drawn to light? How does that connect to the larger themes of the novel?
14. Why do you think Jessica decides to talk to Melissa Kramer? Are you surprised by her loyalty to Liam through this process? What is motivating her to support, at least in image, Spaceco? Why does she finally start to turn away?
15. What do you think the lesson in the revival of Jessica’s roses is? Why did Foster pick those flowers to save?

**Suggested reading**

*Shine Shine Shine*by Lydia Netzer; *The Age of Miracles*by Karen Thompson Walker;*State of Wonder*by Ann Patchett; *Prodigal Summer*by Barbara Kingsolver;*The Signature of All Things* by Elizabeth Gilbert