

Suggested Book Club Discussion Topics for

THE RUBY-VIPER TRILOGY

by Martha Marks

Rubies of the Viper, The Viper Amulet, and The Ruby Ring

#1 — *Rubies of the Viper*

1. The **rubies** in *Rubies of the Viper* appear in several different contexts. Can you describe those different contexts? How do they impact the story?
2. Do you recall how those **rubies** first entered the story and why there were so many of them? What did that tell you about the character who originally acquired them? What ultimately happened to that character... and how did that development influence the rest of the story?
3. What's your opinion of the role that those **rubies** play in the story? Do you see them as a positive force or a negative force?
4. Who or what do you think "**the viper**" is? How did you come to that conclusion?
5. What role does "**the viper**" play in the novel? Overall, is "the viper" a positive influence on the story or a negative one?
6. How do the various **locations** impact the story? Do you have a favorite?
7. Did any of the **major plot twists** surprise you? Did any not surprise you? Were there any interesting minor plot twists as well?
8. Why do you think the author chose to have **two alternating point-of-view characters**? If you had written this novel, who would you have chosen to be the point-of-view character(s)?
9. If someone who had not read this novel asked you to **describe its two point-of-view characters**, what would you say? How did they grow as the story progressed and their relationship evolved?

10. One reviewer has written that, at the beginning of this novel, **Theodosia Varro seems "bratty."** Do you agree with that description of her personality and behavior? What deeper emotional or psychological factors did you see influencing her at that stage of her life? By the end of the book, how had your opinion of her personality and character changed?
11. Who were your **favorite character** and your **least-favorite character**? What did you like or dislike about them?
12. Did you have a **strong reaction**, either positive or negative, to any one thing that a character says or does in this novel? Why did you feel that way?
13. What **major theme (or themes)** stand out for you? What about important minor themes?
14. Before reading *Rubies of the Viper*, how much did you know or understand about the **culture of ancient Rome**? How did your opinion of that culture change as you read?
15. Knowing that the author has written **two sequels** that continue the first-century family saga that begins with *Rubies of the Viper*, what do you expect will happen in her next novel, *The Viper Amulet*?



#2 — *The Viper Amulet*

1. The object called a **viper amulet** appears in several different contexts in this novel. How do the various contexts impact the story?
2. The **viper amulet** initially entered the story in Book 1, *Rubies of the Viper*. Do you recall which character had it made, and why? What happens to it through the course of that first novel? Where did it wind up at the end of that first book and now, at the end of this second book?
3. What's your opinion of the significance of the role that the **viper amulet** plays in the story?
4. Do you see the **viper amulet** as a positive force or a negative force for any particular character(s)?
5. In what ways is this **second novel of the trilogy** similar to or different from the first?
6. How do the various **locations** impact the story? Do you have a favorite among the new settings in this book?
7. Did any of the **major plot twists** surprise you? Did any not surprise you? Were there any interesting minor plot twists as well?
8. In reading *The Viper Amulet* after *Rubies of the Viper*, what did you think about having a **second different alternate point-of-view character**? How was the story in this second novel changed by experiencing it through a new second (or alternative) point of view? If you had written this book, who would you have chosen to be the point-of-view character(s)?
9. If someone who had not read this novel asked you to **describe its two point-of-view characters**, what would you say? How did they grow as the story progressed?
10. Who were your **favorite character** and your **least-favorite character**? What did you like or dislike about them?
11. Did you have a **strong reaction**, either positive or negative, to any one thing that a **new character** says or does in this novel? Why did you feel that way?
12. What **major theme (or themes)** stand out for you in *The Viper Amulet*? What about important minor themes?
13. Before reading *The Viper Amulet*, did you know **how free women lived in ancient Greece**? Did any aspect of their lives, as described in this novel, surprise you? Are there any comparisons to that lifestyle in our modern world?

14. Before reading *The Viper Amulet*, did you know about the **Roman-Jewish War, aka "The Great Revolt"**? If you already knew about it, what new information did you gain about it from this novel? If you didn't know about it before, what surprised you?

15. What do you expect will happen in the trilogy's final novel, *The Ruby Ring*?



#3 — *The Ruby Ring*

1. The **ruby ring** appears in many scenes in this novel. How does it impact the story?
2. Do you recall the **ruby ring** being mentioned in a previous book of the trilogy? If so, can you describe those moments?
3. Which character had the **ruby ring** made and why? What did that tell you about the character who originally had it made? What's the significance of that ring?
4. In this third novel, do you see the **ruby ring** as a positive force or a negative one? Do the characters see it in the same way you do, or differently?
5. How do the various **locations** impact the story? Do you have a favorite among the new settings in this book?
6. Did any of the **major plot twists** surprise you? Did any not surprise you? Were there any interesting minor plot twists as well?
7. If someone who had not read this novel asked you to **describe the two point-of-view characters**, what would you say? How did they grow as the story progressed?
8. In reading *The Ruby Ring* after both *Rubies of the Viper* and *The Viper Amulet*, what did you think about having a **third different alternate point-of-view character**? If you had written this book, who would you have chosen to be the point-of-view character(s)?
9. Who were your **favorite character** and your **least-favorite character**? What did you like or dislike about them?
10. Did you have a **strong reaction**, either positive or negative, to any one thing that a **new character** says or does in this novel? Why did you feel that way?
11. Before reading *The Ruby Ring*, did you know about **The Year of Four Emperors, AD 69**? Did any of the true-life history portrayed in this novel surprise you? Do you know of any parallels to that year in modern history?
12. How is this **third book of the trilogy** similar to and different from the second novel?
13. What **major theme (or themes)** stand out for you in *The Ruby Ring*? What about important minor themes?
14. Using your imagination to **extend this story into the future**, who would you expect to be the main characters going forward? How would they likely change or grow?



FOR THOSE WHO HAVE READ THE ENTIRE TRILOGY

1. In what ways are these three novels **similar**? In what ways are they **different**?
2. Which **characters** appear, even briefly, in all three books?
3. Can you name some **characters** who appear in only one of the novels? Why are they memorable to you?
4. The main character, Theodosia Varro, ages in these novels. How does the **passing of time** alter her aspirations, attitudes, and abilities?
5. What do you think about the **mix of historical figures and fictional characters**? Could the story have been told as well or better without the interactions of real and made-up people?
6. Is there any **one specific place** that lingers in your mind after reading the entire trilogy? What aspects in particular made it significant to the characters and the overall story?
7. What cities and countries (or towns and provinces) serve as **major settings** for these novels? Do any places appear in all three books? Based on the written descriptions, which places did you like most or least? What was it that you liked or disliked in the way they were described?
8. This trilogy includes characters who speak a variety of **languages**, most prominently Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. Were you able to follow conversations when the speakers combined two or even three of those? Can you imagine any better way that the author could have handled such multilingual scenes?
9. What **overarching plot threads** run through all three novels? How do they intersect and play out over the course of the trilogy?
10. What **overarching themes** run through all three novels? How do they intersect and play out over the course of the trilogy?
11. Based on what you read in this trilogy, why do you think **slavery** was ubiquitous in ancient societies? How did slavery in the Roman empire differ from slavery in the United States in the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s? Was ancient slavery better or worse — or maybe no different — than the American version?
12. There is **physical and psychological violence (or abuse)** in all three novels because those things were typical of the people, places, and events of the first century AD. How accurately do you think the author portrayed what might have happened to real people living at that time?

13. Were you surprised by anything you observed or learned about the **lands and cultures** around the Mediterranean Sea in the first century AD? Did anything *not* surprise you?
14. Now that you've finished these books, which **incidents or episodes** stand out the most for you? Why?
15. After reading all three novels, are you satisfied with **the way the last book ends**? Why do you think the author chose that conclusion? Can you envision any other way — better, worse, or about the same — that she might have concluded her trilogy?
16. Based on their publication dates—*Rubies of the Viper*, 2010; *The Viper Amulet*, 2017; *The Ruby Ring*, 2025—it's obvious that the author wrote these novels over multiple decades. Did you detect any stylistic or thematic shifts that might be attributed to that long period of work? Do you know anything about her personal life that may have impacted the length of time between their publication dates?
17. The author chose this tag line for her series: **The Ruby-Viper Trilogy: A Sprawling and Suspenseful First-century Family Saga**. After reading all three novels, what do you think about that description?