

## Questions for Discussion

1. This book has multiple points of view. How do these serve to explore the theme of animal rights, particularly as they apply to chimpanzees? Which character view aligns most closely with your own?
2. How do the events in the chimpanzee society mirror those of the human one, and vice versa? How are they different?
3. How does the display of dominance or subservience play a role in the human world and the chimpanzee world in the novel?
4. How did Zack and Dana's experiences with Annie shape their adult lives? What kind of conflict does it create between them?
5. Which was your favorite chimpanzee?
6. How does the title's significance go beyond the literal captivity of the chimps in the sanctuary?



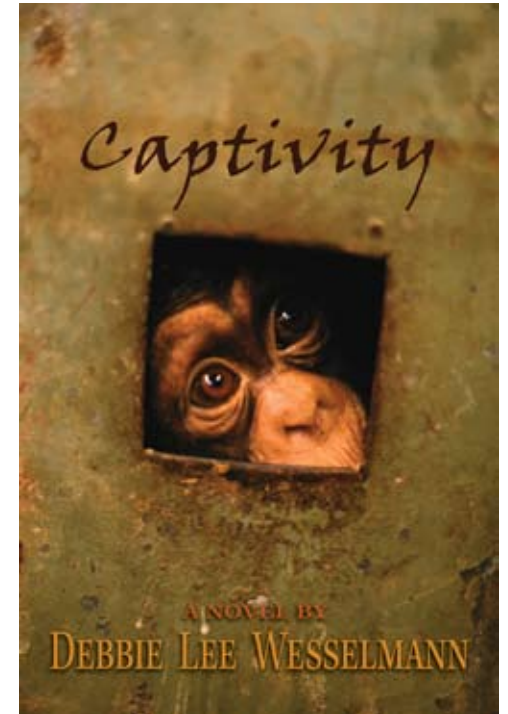
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### READING GROUP GUIDE



### CAPTIVITY

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## A Word from Debbie Lee Wesselmann

When I was in high school, one of my English teachers said of an author we were studying, “He writes the same story over and over, but with different characters.” Although I no longer remember which author we were discussing, the words stayed with me as a lesson for my own writing. Always tell a new story. Explore new territory, and take your readers with you. Although the goal seems simple, its execution is not, since fiction emerges from the writer’s imagination, which is, by her experience and neurology, fixed. I cannot re-create who I am, and therefore I cannot completely divorce myself from my passions and personality. Nor do I want to. What I can do, however, is find a story so unlike what I have written before that it unlocks a previously hidden part of myself. *Captivity* is such a novel. If you had told me while I was writing *Trutor & the Balloonist* that someday I would be writing about chimpanzees and animal rights, I would have been astonished.

Like many of my stories, *Captivity* was born out of writer’s block—not of severe paralysis but of the foundering of not knowing what to write next. When this happens, I browse through magazines, surf the Web, and explore new places—anything that might spark my creative impulse. As I was flipping through back issues of *Smithsonian Magazine*, I settled on a brief article about

female primatologists who taught captive baby chimps how to behave around their own species. The paradox of it startled me: How can a human teach another species to be itself? And why would this even be necessary? I started to explore these issues, which in turn led to more questions and more research. Soon, I had accumulated a small library of books on chimpanzee behavior, animal rights, and the people dedicated to them. I absorbed it all.

Facts, however, do not make good fiction. I still had no inkling of a novel—until the mysterious force of the subconscious, working underneath the accumulated layer of knowledge, began to push its way to the surface. At some point, and I cannot specify when or how, Dana Armstrong emerged. She is both the primatologist trying to allow captive chimps their nature and the child who wanted her chimp “sister” to be treated like a human. She represents the bridge between the past and the present—and even beyond, to the future. Once a part of an experiment herself, Dana has a unique kinship with the chimps and their predicament.

Once I had Dana, the plot, the setting, and the other characters—her brother Zack, the reporter Sam Wendt, her father, the individual chimps, her associates, and her nemesis—began to take shape. Although the research formed the framework of the novel, it became subservient to the characters and the mystery of blame and motive. When the novel opens, the chimpanzees have been released, and this sets in motion a series of

events, each more threatening than the last, that adds complexity to what initially may seem a simple story. My goal is always to entertain—to keep the reader turning the pages until late into the night—while exploring important issues and themes.

Despite the newness of the story, I remain the same writer, albeit a little older, a little wiser than I was when I wrote my last work. The astute reader can point to similarities and motifs that appear in other works. For example, I wrote a novella, *Vibrissa*, that also explores animal rights but in a completely different context of love and desire. Many of my protagonists are strong women like Dana who are not quite comfortable with where their lives have taken them, but I also occasionally write from the point of view of men, as I do with Zack, Reginald, and Sam in *Captivity*. My imagery, the stuff of the subconscious, probably can be traced from story to story, although I prefer not to be too introspective about that. I’ll leave literary analysis to readers and critics.

Although *Captivity* took me years to research and write, I hope that readers find this fictional world all too brief. To me, a compliment even greater than “This is so different from your last story!” is “I wish it had never ended.” But books end, of course. They remain as artifacts of the author’s mind as well as a reminder to readers that human experience has a vastness that they have only begun to touch.