



VILLA AMERICA – Questions for Discussion

1. Does *Villa America* have a main character? If so, who do you think it is, and why?
2. *Villa America's* characters experience many different types of love. Can you identify some of these types? Is it possible for them to coexist in one person? In one's feelings for a single other person?
3. On page 42, it dawns on Sara that there "was something grotesque about affairs or amours... as if romantic love and family were not compatible." Does Sara's stance on this matter change throughout the novel? If so, how? Do you think this is still a relative concern for women today?
4. What, in your opinion, is the basis of Gerald and Sara's love for each other? What kind of love is it? Do they both experience it the same way?
5. On page 334, Sara feels that "Hadley should never have forced [Hemingway] to choose between two kinds of love." Do you agree with her? Have you ever had to make a similar choice? Discuss.
6. The novel is divided into sections: "What Was Lost," "The Awakening," "The Golden Bowl," and "What Was Found." What developments in each section do you think inspired these titles? Consider alternate titles for the four sections. What could they be and why?
7. *Villa America* takes place between the two World Wars. In what ways has the legacy of World War I impacted these characters?

8. On the eve of World War II, twenty years after he had fought in France, Owen writes, in a letter to Vladimir, “Maybe it’s time to admit that there are no ideas that last” (385). How do you interpret this statement? What does it say about Owen’s experience of war and its effect on him?
9. What role does America play for the Murphys? On page 345, Gerald remarks to Owen that he doesn’t believe they could ever return to the country. Why do you think he feels this way? What is the significance of Sara and Gerald’s decision to name their house Villa America?
10. On page 398, in one of Archibald MacLeish’s letters to Dos Passos, he comments on the challenge of writing about Gerald and Sara. “Their gift is not one of giving beauty, which might be captured, but of revealing it,” he says. What does he mean by this? Do you agree with him? Consider the influential people in your own life. What would you say their gifts to you have been?
11. If you had been in Gerald’s position, how would you have handled your feelings for Owen? What would you have done if you were in Owen’s shoes?
12. Why do you think we never see Owen’s letters to Gerald? What does Liza Klausmann achieve narratively by excluding them? How did it affect your experience as the reader to only see one side of the correspondence?
13. What do you make of Sara’s continued friendship with Owen throughout the book? Consider the type of person she is. What might be her motivations for maintaining the relationship? What does she lose by allowing it, and alternately, what would she stand to lose by not doing so?
14. Throughout the novel, Gerald feels as though he has had to conceal his true self from his friends. Have you ever felt the same way? Do you think those friendships are any less real because of it? Why or why not?
15. Discuss how the novel ends. Why did Klausmann decide to end the novel at this moment? What do you predict will happen to Sara and Gerald? To the other characters?
16. This novel depicts some of twentieth century literature’s most famous figures—Hemingway, Fitzgerald, etc. How do these portrayals compare to other ones you’ve seen? Have you ever imagined these figures for yourself? How does the novel compare with what you imagined?
17. Gerald deeply opposes the strict parenting he experienced as a boy. What do you think of Gerald’s father’s parenting? Of Gerald’s?