



About The Book

Gene Stratton-Porter (1863-1924) was a naturalist who lived much of her life in Indiana. She spent her time in nature and writing about nature. Her book *A Girl of the Limberlost* is one of many books she wrote set in the swamps where she grew up and studied. She spent so much time in the swamp, people began calling her “The Bird Lady,” who is a character in the book. This was one of many books published in an attempt to conserve the Limberlost Swamp; however, three years after the publishing of the book, the swamp was completely developed.

The book follows the journey of Elnora Comstock from child to woman. Elnora is the daughter of a widow. Her father died the night she was born and Elnora’s mother always regrets not being able to help him that night and blames Elnora. School provides many challenges for Elnora, financially, socially, physically, and emotionally. Mrs. Comstock does nothing to help her daughter through her troubles. However, Elnora is fiercely independent and puts herself through high school. She is able to finance her studies by collecting butterflies and moths from

the Limberlost Swamp that she sells to The Bird Lady. She grows and develops into a fine society lady.

After she graduates from high school she meets a visitor in the swamp. Philip Ammon is recuperating from an illness in the country. He is fascinated by nature and begins helping Elnora collect in order to pay for college. Philip is engaged to be married to Edith Carr back home in Chicago, but Elnora is such a fine woman that he becomes conflicted. Eventually Philip goes home to Chicago, but he is a changed man. Edith travels to meet Elnora and through all their differences Elnora remains a fine woman of character.

Discussion Guide

1. Consider the following when answering the questions. Most of the neighbors are selling their swamp to be developed. This is reducing the diversity and quantity of moths for Elnora to collect. Could this book even be set in the present? Do people live in swamps as they did in the early 1900's? How could the setting be modified to fit into today's world?
2. In chapter 12 we see the transformation of Mrs. Comstock. What is the significance of her going out to collect moths? What does it symbolize when the moths she collects destroy Elnora's collection?
3. Elnora was able to finance high school and possibly could have financed all of college by selling collected butterflies and moths. Today it would be impossible to pay for college by selling insects. What has changed? Why were insects so valuable back then?

4. Clearly the Limberlost provides financial support for Elnora and her mother, but in what other ways does the Limberlost provide for Elnora and her mother? How does this compare to what the swamp provides to other characters in the book?
5. Knowing that Gene Stratton-Porter is symbolized as The Bird Lady, how does that affect your view of The Bird Lady? How does it affect your view of the book?
6. In chapter 16 Philip argues that Elnora should not go to college. Are his arguments valid? Would they still be valued if argued today? What has changed about the view of college and education?
7. Phillip wanted Edith to wear a dress like a moth. Is this more of a reflection of his love of nature or his love of Elnora?
8. The imperial moth is the most elusive moth for Elnora. What does the imperial moth represent? What is similar about the three times that it does show up in the book? What is the effect this moth has on people?
9. What is Billy's role in the book? How is he different in his own home, in the Sinton's home, and in Freckles' home? Why does he act differently in the three locations? How does this relate to nature?
10. Why does Gene Stratton-Porter end the novel talking about Edith rather than Elnora? What does her interaction with the moth symbolize?

Daniel Taylor

Summer 2017