

Discussion Questions
Someone Always Nearby
Susan Wittig Albert

1. How would you describe any of the many interpretations of the title *Someone Always Nearby* as they relate to María Chabot's and Georgia O'Keeffe's "rollercoaster decade" together?
2. What were María Chabot's motives for heading out to Ghost Ranch to live and work with Georgia O'Keeffe in the first place? Did María accomplish what she set out to learn and do?
3. Stieglitz was twenty-two years older than Georgia and maintained an affair with Dorothy Norman, forty years younger than himself. María Chabot was 26 when she met Georgia O'Keeffe, who was 53. Georgia liked to flirt with men much younger than herself. Did age differences impact any aspect of the story in your mind? Explain.
4. Compare Georgia O'Keeffe's personality with that of María Chabot's. Discuss each woman's distinctly different way of working her way through life and displaying empathy (or not) with the people around her. What dualities can you name, other than married/unmarried; employer/employee?
5. Georgia stands on the portal of her house at Ghost Ranch and looks across the orange and red and purple badlands toward Pedernal...the mountain, which María tells her is sacred to the Navajos. For them, Pedernal is Changing Woman, transforming herself with the seasons and the natural rhythms of life." In what ways is each of these women like Changing Woman over the course of the novel?
6. Did the narrative style of *Someone Always Nearby* work for you? (María's sections are first-person, followed by third-person in the Georgia chapters.) How does this pattern fit with the characterization of these two creative women?
7. Several "interchapters" are written from an omniscient point of view, looking around and behind and beyond the characters into the world they inhabit. (The Piedra Lumbre, Ghost Ranch, Los Luceros, Abiquiu.) How did these sections extend the story? Were they helpful?
8. The story is set in the context of World War II. How is that important?
9. Discuss your reaction to the seesaw of the changing wills in this novel. (Mary Wheelright's and Georgia O'Keeffe's)

10. In Maria's 1976 copy of *Georgia O'Keeffe*, O'Keeffe wrote: "For Maria Chabot, who made the Abiquiu House a place to live and has dreamed other dreams with me here near the cliffs and the red hills." Why is this dedication notable?
11. The Afterword (the O'Keeffe/Hamilton story) is written from the author's point of view. Why do you think she has chosen this strategy? Did it work for you? What questions are left unanswered in your mind? Why?
12. What is the significance of the passage by Rebecca Solnit that the author quotes in the Readers' Note at the beginning of the book?

We think we tell stories, but stories often tell us, tell us to love or to hate, to see or to be blind . . . The task of learning to be free requires learning to hear them, to question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them, and then to become the storyteller.