

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A GRANDMOTHER BEGINS THE STORY

1. The meaning of the novel's title, *A Grandmother Begins the Story*, is layered. Did your interpretation of the title change as you finished the book?
2. This novel has a number of grandmothers, each of whom takes center stage at different points in the book. How do each of the grandmothers shape the stories that are being told?
3. The stories of a bison herd are told alongside the human stories. How do the bison stories and human stories reflect, mirror, or speak to each other?
4. How do bison mothering and grandmothering reflect each other in this novel? And human mothering and grandmothering? Why do you think the novel was written this way?
5. There are very few male characters in *A Grandmother Begins the Story*, but the main male characters play a pivotal role. How do they affect the outcome of the stories of both the humans and bison? Why does the Englishman have no name? Do Jay's final actions change your perception of him and his relationship with his son?
6. Some of the characters speak from the Spirit World. How does the Spirit World contribute to the novel's meaning? Is this Spirit World different from the one you've believed in? What do you think of the roles of death and dying in this novel?
7. If there were a definition of hope at the beginning of this book, what might that be? What is the role of hope in the novel's outcome?
8. The women in the book are members of one Métis family. How do each of the women struggle in different ways with their identity and the long-term impacts of intergenerational trauma?
9. Geneviève and her sister Velma reconnect through music at the rehab center. How does this relationship help them better understand their own life stories?
10. Carter is asked to help her grandmother kill herself. What do you think of the role of anger in her character's development? What is it that makes Carter begin to care enough to get her life together?
11. How does Dee's life story interact with Carter's? Why is Dee angry? What do you think is going to happen to Dee after this book ends?
12. Which of the characters don't get to speak very much? Why do you think their voices were not given more space? If they could speak, what might they say?
13. There are a number of stories told in the book: Solin tells a story to the calves; the elder Elaine tells a story to Geneviève; Geneviève finishes Elaine's story. Why are these stories included in the novel, and why don't readers get to hear Geneviève's ending?
14. What does this novel have to say about dealing with difficult family relationships? Specifically, with the often-challenging relationships between mothers and daughters?
15. What did the nonhuman characters contribute to the novel? Would it be the same without those voices?

