

Book Club Discussion Questions

Although *The Storyteller's Daughter: Where the Story Begins* is written for young adults, there are themes and layers of meaning for readers of all ages to explore. The combination of pathos and humour create a complex narrative that brings to life the trials and tribulations of coming of age. It is a tale of familial love and loss, the seductive power of fantasy, and the importance of being able to experience life one breath at a time. The following questions are intended to spark discussion, and provide leaping-off points to get your club talking.

1. Setting

The Storyteller's Daughter is set in southern Manitoba. Although the novel belongs to the fantasy genre, much of the action takes place in the real world—Winnipeg, Manitou, Ninette, and Y-Point at Pelican Lake. The character of Larry Selby is likewise a real person and a real lawyer. What is the effect of this juxtaposition of the real and the fantastic? Would the effect be different if the story had been set in a more exotic location? What role does Mr. Selby play in the novel?

2. Themes of memory, narrative, and identity

Sociologists and cultural critics agree that we are all storytellers: we constantly narrate and interpret for ourselves and for each other the events of our lives. However, this narrative—like memory itself—is not static. It changes as we do, and is subject to revision according to our ongoing experiences. The novel continuously returns to this connection between narrative/storytelling and identity. How do we see Skye's personal narrative evolving over time? Other characters make attempts to "rewrite" or reinvent their pasts and the narratives of their daily lives according to their fantasies. Who do we see tampering with their own stories? Why do they do this? Do we see such "revisions" in real life?

3. Change

At the beginning of the novel, Skye's life is changed not only by tragic loss, but by the haste with which her parents' lives and deaths are put to rest. How do people deal with change in real life? Do Skye's reactions to her changing circumstances seem authentic? What effect do elements of fantasy have on the way Skye copes with her losses?

4. The Fates

The Morrighana are drawn from a number of mythologies and traditional sources, including Greek, Norse, and Celtic myths. In *The Storyteller's Daughter*, the three women represent multiple aspects of a single entity. Is it necessary to be familiar with the traditions being drawn upon in order to fully appreciate these characters? To what extent are authors responsible for representing their sources accurately? To what extent are authors free to take artistic or creative liberties?

5. Fate versus free will

How would you describe the relationship between fate and free will in the novel? To what extent do you think the Fates intercede on Skye's behalf? What role does coincidence play in the unfolding plot? What is the role of personal choice and responsibility in a world that contains three Fates?

6. Magic

Skye explains that "being a seannachie isn't really magic. It's the kind of thing people do all the time when they get caught up in a story and lose track of time. Or when they remember something so strongly they can smell it or taste it or see it. The truth is, people are always skirting the edges of what seannachies do. Seannachies just do it *more*. They go *further*" (114). How does this imagining of the seannachies' power compare with magic as it is represented in other fantasy novels? What do you think of this form of magic?

7. Parents

What role do parents play in this novel? How would you describe the relationship between parents and their children? Although none of the parents in the novel are perfect, can you relate to any of their motives or reactions? Can you sympathize with them?

8. Character arcs

Each of the three girls has a distinct character arc and series of lessons that she has to learn. Each girl is also essential to the quest. How does each of the three girls contribute to the evolution of the plot? What does each girl have to learn in order to fulfil her role?

9. Randall

Randall is an ambiguous character. How would you describe him? What role does he play in the novel? Who is he? What happens to him in the end?

10. The final battle between Bertram and Taranis

The final battle takes place between Bertram and the god Taranis, not Skye and Taranis. What is Bertram's role? Is his transformation significant? Does his role in the fight with Taranis detract from Skye's role as heroine?

11. Maggie

For fifteen years, Maggie is trapped in a story of her own devising. How does she become ensnared? What finally draws Maggie back into the world? Why does Skye succeed when she meets her mother on the beach, when she was failed before? How does grief manifest in real life? Is the novel's representation of grief realistic?

12. Final lines

How would you describe the tone of novel? What is its over-arching message? Is this a hopeful ending? Were you satisfied by this novel? Would you recommend it to others?