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1. Kestrel lives in a colonized land her father conquered ten years ago. After the conquest, the territory's people—the Herrani—were enslaved. What happened wasn't Kestrel's fault, yet every day since has revolved around her advantages and power over others. If we profit from someone else's cruel actions, does that make us guilty, too? At what point do we become responsible for allowing an immoral situation to continue?
2. Arin says that Kestrel's old nurse, a former slave, could never have truly loved her. "If she loved you," he says, "it's because she had no choice." Is it impossible for love to exist between a slave and a free person?
3. From black and gold military garb to elaborate ball gowns to a house slave's uniform, clothes play an important role in *The Winner's Curse*. How do clothes send messages in a society? What do you think people are trying to say or do when they dress a certain way? What do you want your clothes to say about yourself?
4. Kestrel thinks, "In the eyes of Valorian society, music was a pleasure to be taken, not made, and it didn't occur to many that the making and the taking could be the same." What's the difference between taking pleasure in something, and *making* your pleasure? Can you think of a situation where you must make something in order to take pleasure in it?
5. At first, Kestrel refuses to acknowledge her growing fascination with Arin. But other people see it, and vicious gossip begins. Can gossip be a weapon? How do you feel about the way society tries to make people conform to expectations by talking about them?
6. When Kestrel buys Arin, he despises her, but gradually he comes to see her as a person he can respect and eventually love. At the same time, she's still part of a society that has taken everything from him. Is it possible to forgive an enemy?
7. If Kestrel's father lived in today's society, he could be tried for war crimes. But she loves him, and he loves her. What would you do if someone in your family committed a terrible crime? Would it change how you felt about that person?
8. Kestrel is a strategist. She could easily lead an army to victory by making the right military choices. But she doesn't want to go to war. Is there something that you are good at, but also afraid of?
9. While Kestrel doesn't want to use her strategizing skills for military purposes, she's very happy to beat everyone at a game called Bite and Sting. How can playing games with others change how we feel about them?