

WINTERLAND

A painting of a ballerina in a red leotard holding a large red umbrella in a snowy landscape. The ballerina is the central figure, standing on a snowy ground. She is wearing a red leotard and has her right leg raised and supported by the handle of a large, dark red umbrella. The umbrella is open and has a white, snow-like texture on its underside. The background is a snowy, hazy landscape with a dark, silhouetted forest in the distance. The overall style is painterly and evocative.

A NOVEL

BOOK
CLUB
KIT

RAE MEADOWS



Welcome to the Book Club Kit for

WINTERLAND

Please note: In order to provide book clubs with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading the novel, you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. *Winterland*, while a fictional story, has characters based on real gymnasts who competed in the 1980s Olympics. How does your previous knowledge or lack thereof of the history behind the Moscow Olympics inform your reading experience?
2. Vera wonders what Anya would have been like if Katerina had lived. Do you think Anya would have chosen gymnastics over dance if her mother had been around?
3. Why do you think Katerina's faith in communism waned while Yuri's persisted? Why do you think Vera stayed after being released from the gulag? Is there an argument to be made that life outside the gulag and inside were not that different?
4. The United States, among 65 other nations, boycotted the 1980s Moscow Olympics to protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. What would be different if *Winterland* was set today, leading up to the 2024 Olympics?
5. Anya's end to gymnastics was a slow burn rather than an abrupt ending, like in the case of Elena. Do you feel like it was a satisfying end for her? Do you think it's possible to train your whole life for something (gymnastics, dance) yet still retain your initial love for it?
6. Why do you think Katerina turned around at the office and embarked on that fateful walk? Do you think her pregnancy made her more desperate to find a way out? Or surer that she needed to do whatever it took to stay with her family?



7. What did you think of Anya and Yuri's eventually settling in America?
8. The town that Yuri, Anya and Vera live in is one of the most polluted cities in the world - why do you think the author chose to set the novel here?
9. Why do you think Boris, the guard, saved Vera that day at the camps? Do you think he was a good person or a bad person? Why?
10. Anya and Sveta dreamed of making the program and getting out one day to the United States. What do you think would have happened if the roles were reversed and Sveta made it in while Anya was cut?
11. The gymnastics world today has seen many allegations of sexual assault and inappropriate behavior from doctors or coaches to the young women. We see that happen with Karolina and her coach early on in the book as well. Do you feel like there has been progress in changing this dynamic almost five decades later? What still needs to change? Did you have any feeling of empathy for Anya's coach at the end? Why or why not?
12. Katerina kept a banned copy of poems by Marina Tsvetaeva. Years later, Anya finds the book and uses the poems she memorized to share her love for Elena. Do you think Tsvetaeva's words would have had such a strong impact on Anya if they weren't banned? How does the use of a banned book in the 1970s USSR relate to our current climate?
13. At one point Anya says to Elena, "We were the bulls." What do you make of that?
14. What do you make of the very ending, and Anya doing gymnastics on the beach?

