



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Homestead

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Homestead*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups 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 *Homestead*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. *Homestead* alternates between Marie and Lawrence's perspectives. What is the effect of that narrative choice on your reading experience?
2. How do you understand Marie and Lawrence's decision to get married? What are their expectations of the marriage? How do those expectations hold up once they are actually living together?
3. What do Marie and Lawrence each hope for from the homestead? What does it represent to them?
4. *Homestead* is structured around the seasons, with each chapter taking place over the course of a month. How do the cycles of a year shape the novel's form and plot?
5. Discuss Marie's relationship with her sister, Sheila. How are their lives similar and different, especially their marriages?
6. Why does Lawrence frequently resist physical intimacy with Marie? How does that push and pull affect their relationship?
7. How are Lawrence and Marie affected by their conversations with Shem Pete? Compare and contrast their reactions to his perspective. How does Shem's viewpoint complicate the ideas of homesteading and Alaskan statehood?
8. Lawrence is haunted by his experiences during the Korean War, and compares his night terrors to a swarm of mayflies. What effect did military service have on him? How does it influence his relationship with Marie?
9. *Homestead* is set in the 1950s, when there were often strict gender norms that shaped one's place in the world. How do Marie and Lawrence conform to those norms, and how do they thwart them? Were there any aspects of their characterizations that surprised you?
10. When Shem talks about experiencing racism in Anchorage, he refers to a law being passed, which is actually the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945, the first anti-discrimination law in Alaska and the U.S. Discuss instances in the novel where we see racism, exclusion, and

prejudice at play. How might those issues continue to echo in Alaska (and across the country) today?

11. Marie and Lawrence were raised in completely different parts of the country by very different families, but they each struggled to feel a sense of belonging. How did their childhoods shape them, and what were they trying to leave behind and gain by moving to Alaska?
12. Over the course of two years, Marie and Lawrence witness the push for Alaskan statehood and are in Anchorage when the official announcement comes through. How are their lives affected by statehood? Discuss the ways in which the political and the domestic are woven together in this novel.
13. Why do you think the author decided to include the full text of the homestead deed in the novel? What was the effect, for you, of reading it? What is its significance to Marie and to Lawrence?
14. Why does Lawrence decide to sign the deed without Marie, despite his promise? Do you sympathize at all with his action?
15. How do you understand Marie's decision to forgive Lawrence and continue their life together? What do you think the future holds for them?
16. Discuss the portrayal of Alaska in this novel. Did it surprise you or change the way you think about the state? If so, how?