

Slanting Towards the Sea: Reading Group Guide

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Ivona so fixated on Vlaho's life after their divorce? What does this reveal about her character and her regrets?
2. How does the novel explore the themes of Dalmatian identity, tradition, and the pull of "home"? Consider the significance of the sea, the olive groves, and the bura wind.
3. Analyze the complex relationships within Ivona's family, particularly her relationship with her father and brother. How do these relationships shape her choices and her sense of self?
4. One of the most impactful and challenging relationships in Ivona's life was the one she had with her mother. How did this relationship shape Ivona's notion of love and self-worth?
5. Discuss the theme of unrealized potential in Ivona's life. What factors have contributed to her current situation, and how does she grapple with her past aspirations?
6. What role does Frana play in Ivona and Vlaho's relationship and eventual divorce? How does the secret they share impact their interactions?
7. How does Marina's character challenge or subvert typical portrayals of "the other woman"? What does Ivona's relationship with Marina reveal about her?
8. Explore the symbolism of olive oil and olive cultivation in the novel. How does it connect to themes of tradition, heritage, and Ivona's personal growth?
9. Discuss the theme of honesty, both with oneself and with others. How do Ivona's moments of honesty and deception shape her relationships and her understanding of herself?
10. How much control does Ivona actually have over her own recovery? Analyze whether her lack of forward momentum and agency is a realistic consequence of deep, unresolved trauma, cultural circumstances, and limited options, or a personal failure to take responsibility for her own happiness.
11. What is your interpretation of the novel's ending? Does Ivona find a path towards a more fulfilling future?

Enhance Your Book Club

Nostalgia and Regret: The novel is imbued with a sense of nostalgia for the past and regret over missed opportunities. Discuss how these emotions drive Ivona's actions and her internal conflicts.

The Weight of the Past: The characters are constantly grappling with the weight of their past experiences, both personal and historical. How does the novel explore the impact of history on individual lives?

Female Identity and Societal Expectations: Ivona struggles with societal expectations for women in Croatia, particularly regarding career, marriage, and motherhood. Discuss how the novel challenges or reinforces these expectations.

Healing and Personal Agency: Explore different understandings of trauma recovery, including the tension between accepting what cannot be changed and taking responsibility for the choices that remain possible.

Love and Loss: The novel explores different forms of love – romantic love, familial love, and love for one's homeland – and the pain of loss in its various manifestations.

Additional Resources

Dalmatian History and Culture: Explore the history and culture of the Dalmatia region of Croatia to gain a deeper understanding of the novel's setting and themes.

Homeland War: Research the Homeland War (Croatian War of Independence) and its impact on Croatian society.

Food as Cultural Memory: Explore the role of traditional Croatian and Dalmatian food in preserving family history, identity, memory, and connection to place.