

# **A Teacher's Guide to Fern Schumer Chapman's *Motherland*** By Bruce Jay Wasser

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Fern Schumer Chapman's *Motherland* provides numerous compelling opportunities for students to explore serious, provocative and pertinent themes. The memoir tackles issues not solely related to post-Holocaust survival; for example, the author sensitively treats the themes of identity, parent-child relationships, the purpose of memory, moral responsibility and personal reclamation. Her writing is precise, elegant and graceful; with a journalist's concern for detail, the author's prose is also image-laden, lyrical and poetic. The purposes of this teacher's guide are two-fold. First, it offers assistance to teachers who seek guidance in facilitating student understanding of "Motherland." It also provides numerous activities to enrich and stimulate a student's intellectual, emotional, artistic and moral understanding. This guide follows a consistent format. Each chapter (including an introduction to the Penguin paperback edition, the prologue and the epilogue) has a sequential list of discussion questions and a series of creative activities which augment and complement classroom learning experiences. Each chapter will begin with a short summary of the chapter's content. In addition, each chapter, where appropriate, lists additional resources to assist instruction and understanding. Finally, this guide provides a series of culminating, synthetic questions and activities which instructors may use as a comprehensive check for understanding. Instructors and students may access the author's website: [fernschumerchapman.com](http://fernschumerchapman.com). There, the author presents an even more detailed background of the memoir, links to pertinent sites and an invitation to communicate directly with her.

## First Impressions: Introduction to the Penguin Paperback

### Discussion Questions

1. Look at / Examine / Read the cover carefully. What do you see?
2. The title of the work is "Motherland." What images does the title bring to mind? Why did the author select that word title for her memoir?
3. Publishers often use the back of a work to describe the book's contents. Read the paragraph on the back only the first sentence. What questions do you find yourself asking? b) What do you think you will discover by the reading of Motherland?

### Activities

1. Bring a photograph of your mother to our next session. In thirty seconds, introduce her, sharing as much biographical information as you can: name, birth date, birthplace, [death, separation], siblings, interests.
2. Make a list of five questions you'd like to ask your mother and to which you will receive completely truthful responses.  
a) Why did you ask these questions? b) What answers do you anticipate receiving? c) Are there any questions you know your mother cannot or will not answer? Why? 1

## Prologue (ix-xi)

The author introduces us to her mother, an "escapee" from the Holocaust. After defining the term, the author outlines the essential themes of the memoir: identity loss, mother-daughter relationship trauma, the impact of lack of history and the enduring legacy of past dislocation. The prologue concludes with an eloquent plea for self-understanding, for learning the "unknowable" and "unreachable."

### Prologue - Discussion Questions

1. What is the purpose of a prologue?
2. Examine the first sentence of the prologue. Interpret it by: a) asking questions, or b) using negative words ("instead of positive terms).
3. After rereading the first paragraph, why did the author use the word "lucky"? Was her mother truly "lucky"?
4. The author lists everything her mother lost at the end of the first paragraph. Of the five things lost, which would you consider the most serious? Why? Which loss would most devastate you?
5. The second paragraph is a powerful definitional paragraph. The author uses "escapee" as the term to be defined. What words would you use as a result of this descriptive/defining paragraph for her mother? b) What image or metaphor does the author employ to describe her mother? c) Why will surviving be full of "pain" for her mother?
6. The third paragraph is a factual accounting of how children

- became refugees. Which sentence in that paragraph strikes you as the most important? Why?
7. The fourth paragraph has an impressive structure. After the initial sentence, each subsequent sentence is successively shorter. What is the impact of this paragraph structure on the reader? a) Why haven't the author and her mother been able to "evade" the past? What is the Motherland? b) Why did the author conclude this paragraph with "Not me"?
  8. Until the final paragraph, the author continues to reveal more information about her mother. a) What important facts and insights have you learned about her mother? b) What attitude do you think the author has about her mother? c) What are your personal feelings about the author's mother? d) If the author's mother were sitting alone with you, what questions would you ask her?
  9. The stunning final paragraph presents a central theme of the memoir: identity. a) The author lists four components of identity. In your opinion, which is the most important? b) What happens to people who lack self, family, place and past? c) The author, in a private and intimate admission, tells us of her own losses. What losses has the author suffered in her own life? d) The author introduces the idea of a "narrative stream" as a metaphor. What is a "narrative stream"? Where does the author hope she'll find it?
  10. The author never uses her mother's name in the prologue. Why doesn't she give her mother a name?

### **Prologue – Activities**

1. Create a class "I Wonder" list about the memoir. Participants ask questions or make statements that begin with: "I wonder...."

2. Write a brief note to Fern. Tell her what you learned from the prologue, what you think the memoir will now do. What emotions did you feel as you read the prologue?

3. Select any

or image from the prologue and draw it. Create an artistic interpretation of the word/image (much as the cover created an image of the contents of the memoir).

4. Select an event of great significance that has happened to you. It does not matter if anyone else thinks it's important or not. Prepare to tell a narrative about it for our next session.

5. Draw a

"narrative stream." Are you in the drawing? If so, explain your significance. If not, explain your absence.

## Chapter 1 (1-11)

After the author explores the significance of a repressed and "beast"-like past on her mother, Edith, she initiates an analysis of her relationship with her mother. The reader learns of Stockstadt, Edith's hometown in Germany, and its place in her identity. The author explores her own childhood fantasies about family heritage and her furtive incursions into memory and Edith's history. The chapter concludes with Edith and Fern's arrival in Germany in 1990.

### Chapter 1- Discussion Questions

1. Fern says her mother's childhood memories are like a "beast" which "have haunted her for half a century." The author claims her mother's past is "aborted." These are strong descriptive words. Why does the author select such emotion-laden words? What aspects of her mother's past do you believe are so forbidding? (pg. 1)
2. The author states that her mother hopes "going home will free her at last." From what? (1)
3. Fern says that she and her mother are "like two dangling magnets." What does this phrase tell us about their relationship? (2)
4. Describe what Fern does know about her mother's hometown, Stockstadt. What one thing predominates in her knowledge? (2-4)
5. The author states that Stockstadt is the place where "memory" of family lives. What is important to Fern. (4)
6. Why does Edith claim her history may never have happened,

- just "imagined" or "maybe it has all been a dream"
7. Fern's grandmother, in pleading for help, writes that "a divided life is only half a life." "I open the door and is there." Explain these two quotations. (5)
  8. The author lists a series of questions she desperately needs answered but would "not even think of asking her questions and why does she never ask them? (7)
  9. For what reasons did Edith place so little value on or in her past? (7)
  10. What is the significance of the "tattered eleven-by-fourteen inch yellow envelope"? Why did Edith put so photographs? (8-9)
  11. Fern describes a fantasy she had with the photograph of whom she came to know as her grandmother. W this fantasy; why did she play it? (9-10)
  12. What emotions do Fern's food images bring: "the cold, soupy chicken," "the cold, runny scrambled egg" author include these otherwise seemingly unimportant details? (10) 3
  13. The author concludes the first chapter with the flight attendant's warning: "Please fasten your seat belts...and prepare for landing." What does this warning foreshadow? (11)

## Chapter 1 – Activities

1. Write or draw a childhood memory that still troubles/scares/upsets you. What is it about that memory that still carries such impact?

2. 2. Where did you spend your childhood? What words or images best capture it? Create an essay, poem, drawing or collage (photos are excellent to include) to capture your childhood .
3. The author uses the metaphor of "dangling magnets" to describe her relationship with her mother. Choose any member of your family and create/draw a metaphor describing that relationship.
4. Discover one fact/story/anecdote about your family's past. How far back can you trace your own family's roots?
5. Create an artistic expression for the sentences: "A divided life is only half a life." or "I open the door and no one is there."
6. Do you have any "holes" in your history? Describe them.
7. Bring in a photograph of you as a child. What does the photograph reveal about you? your family? your history? What does the photograph obscure or hide?
8. The author had an intense, imagined relationship with her dog, Queenie, one in which she invested the dog with magical qualities. Describe an animal or object (i.e. doll or toy) to which you gave imaginary powers. What purposes did your "fantasy object" serve in your childhood?

## Chapter 2 (12-24)

Upon arrival in Germany, Fern comments on her mother's psychological state in 1990; "estranged" and alienated, Edith acutely senses being "different." The author confronts her own emotional state as well and questions Edith as to why now, some fifty-two years later, Edith has chosen to return. Employing metaphor and imagery, the author amplifies description of her relationship with Edith. At the chapter's conclusion, the reader learns of a woman named Mina, whose very mention sparks an intense reaction from both mother and daughter.

### Chapter 2 - Discussion Questions

1. When the author describes her mother's face, what features does she emphasize? How comfortable is the author with her own face compared to her mother's? (pp. 12-13)
2. Fern describes her mother as "an outsider." In what ways is this description accurate? (14-15)
3. Feeling "estranged," Edith comments, "I am not German anymore. I am an American, but I am different" Explain the differences to which Edith alludes. (14)
4. Fern states: "Now I see: I've come prepared to hate." What and why is she prompted to hate? Do you respect or disagree with the author's initial attitude towards Germany? (15)
5. How was and is Edith a "stranger" to her own daughter? (15)
6. Explain Edith's motivation when she informs the rental-car clerk: "I don't want to drive a Volkswagen." (16)
7. Fern lists a series of questions, all of them wondering why her mother in 1990, "now," chooses to return to Germany.

Reread the series of questions on page 19. Which question strikes you as the most difficult to answer?

8. In a terse response, Edith explains why she has chosen to return in 1990. What is her reason and how do you respond to it? (20)
9. The author employs metaphors and imagery to describe her relationship with her mother and how her mother processes the past. "Talking to my mother can be like decoding hieroglyphics." "She uses minutiae as her armor." Her mind is "cluttered;" she "fills the bytes of her brain." Her brain "short-circuits" when she faces pain. "The past isn't prologue; it is the whole story." "Her soul is forever held hostage to another world." "She lived her life with an eye on the rearview mirror." Using these metaphors and images, what relationship does Edith have with the past? (20-21)
10. We are introduced to a character named Mina. What relationship does she have to Edith? Why is she important to Edith? Why is she important to Fern? (23-24)

## **Chapter 2 – Activities**

1. Draw a portrait, not of your entire face, but one feature of your face (like your eyes, mouth or chin) as the author described an aspect of her own face.
2. Make a list of ways your parent(s) is/are a "stranger" to you. Are you a "chip off the old block" or the opposite of one of your parents?
3. Describe a time where you found yourself very close to a parent, holding an "us against the world" kind of attitude toward a mutual adversary or condition.

4. Have you ever seen either of your parents argue with a salesperson or business representative? What did you learn about your parent(s) through observation?
5. Are there any products you would prefer not to use, to boycott? Create an editorial or editorial cartoon showing your opposition to the offensive product.
6. Using any of the metaphors or images listed in question 9 (see Discussion above), create an artistic interpretation of the metaphor/image.
7. Mina is "like a sister" to Edith. Do you have anyone who is closer to you than family? If so, create a poem, dialogue, essay, sketch, musical composition or collage which speaks to that connection.

### **Chapter 3 (25-38)**

The author and her mother are in Stockstadt, whose presence is symbolized by physical recollection and the memory of ladybugs and storks. As Edith reflects on the manifest changes in her childhood's hometown, the author reminds readers that Edith is "marred by the indelible stain of her exile." Town officials blanch at the very mention of Edith's family name - Westerfeld. The town's historian and de facto curator, Hans Hermann, introduces himself to the two women and insists that he "owes" the author and her mother his services as "tour guide."

### **Chapter 3 - Discussion Questions**

1. When the author comments that Stockstadt "could be in America," what has she noticed about her mother's childhood home? (pg. 26)
2. Bothered by the photo of her grandmother pictured with a "strange girl," Fern wonders how she managed to part with her own child, Edith. Predict what the author's feelings are about this dilemma. (27)
3. What symbol does the empty-legged old man represent? What realization does the author have from this understanding? (27)
4. Edith senses she is in the proper place when she encounters ladybugs. What do these insects represent to her? (28)
5. Searching in the phone book brings a certain epiphany to Edith. Describe her realization and explain its emotional impact on her. (29-30)
6. What symbolic importance do storks play in Edith's life? To some, they are "big, dirty birds." What are they to Edith? (31-32)

7. The author uses a "window" and a "mirror" metaphor to describe an ideal mother-daughter relationship. Using the same metaphors, describe Fern's relationship to Edith. In this context, why is the stork story so important to Fern? (31-32)

8. The absence of storks provokes a deeply personal response from Edith. Describe her response and explain the meaning of the author's phrase: "marred by the indelible stain of her exile." (32) 9. Two town officials appear agitated and lose color upon hearing the name "Vesterfeld." Why does Edith's presence cause such an agitated reaction? (33-34)

9. What are your first impressions of Hans Hermann, the town historian? (34-35)

10. "Home is what you can take away with you" -- Wallace Stegner. Fern uses this quotation to "always somewhat homeless." In what ways are Edith and Fern homeless? (36)

conclude the

11. Hans and Edith's shared, seemingly mild reminiscences have a large impact on Fern. Why is Fern so moved by their conversation? (36)

12. What impact does the mentioning of Mina's name have on Hans? (37)

13. For what reason does Hans insist on being the "tour guide" for the week? What do you feel is motivating his insistence? What could Hans possibly "owe" the Westerfelds? (38)

### **Chapter 3 – Activities**

1. Write or draw what you believe a war victim looks like. In what ways are war victims alike? In what ways do they differ? 2. Select an animal, bird, flower or fish you feel best represents your

city. Create an artistic expression linking your city with your chosen life form.

3. Use the "mirror" and "window" metaphor to describe your relationship with your mother or father. Try to give an artistic interpretation to the metaphor.

4. What was your favorite childhood toy? What were some of your favorite childhood activities?

5. Is there a "fault line" in your own history, a place you don't care to remember or visit in memory? What is on the other side of that "fault line"?

6. Is there anyone in your family or someone you know whose speech is "stained" by an accent? What does an accent do to people living in a country different than their native tongue's land? -- Do you have such an accent? Do any of your friends? What impact does accented speech have on your life?

7. Prepare a special food or dessert from your family's ethnic background to share with the class. What significance is the dish?

purchased, prepared, served and consumed in/by your family?

8. What is the p

9. What is a "ritual"? Are there any family rituals you intend to pass down to your own children? What occurs in a family without ritual, culture or heritage to share?

10. What is the d

between "wanting" to do something and "having to" do something? Do you "owe" anything to anyone? What does a feeling of obligation do to people?

## Chapter 4 (39-52)

This chapter poses pivotal questions about identity, home and the past. Edith considers herself "powerless" when confronting the past and consigns herself to living in an "eternal present." While examining her mother's world-view, the author also explores definitions of "home" and place. As the women tour Hans' museum, the author is unsettled by some of its contents. This unease permits her to ask Edith about Jewish identity and heritage -- crucial aspects of self largely unknown to the author. The chapter concludes with a serious discussion of war guilt, historical responsibility and social ostracism. The author notes that few of us have ever been forced to "look in that mirror" of personal connection and responsibility to the past.

### Chapter 4 - Discussion Questions

1. What does change signify to Edith? In what ways was she "powerless"? (p. 40)
2. To the author, how are Holocaust escapees different than survivors? Do you agree with the author's judgment that escapees are "pure victims"? (41)
3. "The idea of home" is pivotal to Edith. Describe the physical attributes of Edith's home. What does her physical home reveal about her psychological condition? (41)
4. The author informs us that her mother lives in an "eternal present." What does this phrase mean? Give Edith's life that indicate her need to live in that condition. (41-42)
5. Describe the symbolism of the author's decision to move a picture from her mother's wall. (41)

6. In what way did the author absorb some of her mother's insecurities? (42)
7. What does the idea of good-bye signify to Edith? What function does the author play in ~~her~~ accompanying to Germany? (42)
8. Hans, Fern and Edith have three distinct perspectives on the museum. Describe each and analyze the differences similarities of each point of view. (43-46)
9. One of the exhibits in the museum suggests a reason why Fern's maternal grandfather never felt an urgent need leave Germany. What was the exhibit and what did it symbolize to Edith? (46-47) 7
10. Throughout the "tour," Fern is uncomfortable with some of the museum's contents. This unease is understated, however. Give examples of the author's growing sense of unease. (43-46)
11. Edith states: "We didn't even think of ourselves as Jews: we were all good Germans." Paradoxically, her statement is both true and false. Explain this paradox. (47)
12. Edith's Jewish heritage emerges several places as she tours the museum. To what extent does Edith identify herself as a Jew? To what extent, do you think, does the author? (47-48)
13. Museums, like historians, tend to present themselves as neutral, unbiased, without a point of view. Is Hans' collection merely an assemblage of items without a point of view, or does his museum reflect a bias or subjective perspective?
14. To Hans, the items he has received are considered artifacts. What are some of those things to Edith and Fern? (48-49)

15. What pivotal event may have led to Edith's family's artifacts having been placed in the museum?: Why is that event discomfoting to Hans? (49-51)
16. What is war guilt? How does American war guilt over Vietnam differ from German war guilt over the Holocaust? (50)
17. The author describes Hans as "ambivalent" about his country's past. How can Hans be both proud and ashamed simultaneously over his country's history? (50-51)]
18. Explain the following sentence: "How does one live with the past?" (51)
19. Define "ostracism." How does the author perceive the irony of that term regarding German history? (51)
20. The author concludes the chapter with the expression: "Most of us never have to look in that moral mirror, what have Germans hid and/or viewed in that mirror the past fifty years? (52)

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#### **Chapter 4 – Activities**

1. Bring to class one artifact you would be willing to contribute to a museum as emblematic of your life. Be sure to have a story about your artifact to share with your classmates.
2. What is your personal attitude about change? What would you most like to change about yourself if you could?
3. What does "home" mean to you? Sketch your home and describe/draw your favorite place in it. How often have you moved in your life? Do you plan to remain in your city/town or are you eager to leave?

4. Design your ideal home. Give your floor plan and property as much detail as you wish.
5. Have you ever had the desire to reinvent yourself? Through a poem, essay or drawing, ~~describe~~ "redefine" self.
6. What are your greatest insecurities? To what extent is/are your parent(s) involved in them?
7. In what ways do you say good-bye to people? Are partings easy or difficult for you? From ~~describe~~ music, television describe a farewell which had an impact on you.
8. What is your attitude about museums? Has any one left a particularly strong impact?
9. Plan to visit a museum in your community. Analyze the contents and purposes of the museum ~~in order to~~ if the museum has any one "point of view." 8
10. Are there people in our country, today, that even though they have tried to belong, are still not considered 100% American? What common traits do these groups share?
11. What do you know of "Kristallnacht"? Research the event and prepare to share your findings with your classmates and teacher.
12. What knowledge do you have of the Vietnam War? Are there family members who were involved? Try to interview a soldier, conscientious objector or protestor of the war. What memories and attitudes do they still have about the war?
13. Guilt is a powerful emotion and mental state. Is/Are there anything(s) about which you feel guilty? What does the presence of guilt do to a person's life?

14. What are your feelings about our country's past? What are your feelings about your own past? Create a poem or written expression about this topic.
15. Using art or some form of written expression, create a project which treats the issue of not facing one's weaknesses, deficiencies or shame.
16. The author speaks of "extreme circumstances" in life. Have you or any family member or friend ever faced extreme circumstances? What occurred and how did that person(s) react?

## **Chapter 5 (53-62)**

Deeply personal and philosophical, this chapter explores mothering and the inverted order of mother-daughter relations which have marred Edith and Fern's lives. In her German childhood, Edith witnesses her mother's attempted suicide; in Fern's childhood, she observes her mother's post-traumatic stress personality disintegration. Sadly admitting that she was required to "mother" her own mother, the author analyzes what she has meant and what she continues to mean emotionally to Edith, the burdens and psychological displacement that has engendered and how her mother's past has irrevocably stamped Edith's mothering practices.

### **Chapter 5 - Discussion Questions**

1. In a remarkably descriptive paragraph (page 55), the author details how "the past is a presence between us." Given our knowledge that Fern actually knows very little about her mother Edith's past, how and why can the past be Fern's "emotional gene map"?
2. Fern reveals she is named after her maternal grandmother, "of whom I know almost nothing." What impact does this admission have on her? on you? (pg. 55)
3. Edith tells Fern a story about Edith's mother, one which occurred the year before Edith was sent to America. Recreate that story. What did the child Edith observe in the attic? What impact must it have had on the young girl? (55-56)
4. The author confides that she, too, has seen her mother "in the attic." What does the author mean by this? (56-57)
5. Discuss the symbolism of the plums. Use texture and color in your analysis. (57-59)

6. "He's going to get me." What impact does this sentence have on you? What impact did it have on the author, a kindergarten student when she heard it? (58)
7. What descriptive imagery does the author provide of her mother's waking nightmare? What visual image of most unsettled you? (58-59)
8. As a result of this story, what words would you use to categorize or describe Edith? What feelings do you have for her? What feelings do you have for the author as a child? (58-59) 9
9. The mention of the word "Hitler" has several consequences. What does that word mean to Edith and to Fern's paternal grandmother? Who is Hitler to the child Fern? Where is he found? (59)
10. Describe the symbolism of the finger imprints on Fern's forearm. (59 )
11. For what purpose did the author include this chilling anecdote? (56-59)
12. The author actually reveals very little about her childhood experiences with Edith. From what you have read, what kind of childhood the author must have had. What impact that childhood has on her does
13. How does the film clip reflect "all that is right...and wrong with" Edith's mothering? What caused Edith's behavior as a mother? (60)
14. The three paragraphs on pages 60-61 (beginning with "That film clip") have different points of view. The first paragraph has a constant use of the "she;" the second focuses on "I;" the third

- blends the first two
- view to establish a key idea?
15. What does Fern represent to Edith? What are the consequences of placing such pressure or Fern? (60) significance on
  16. Explain the Matrushka doll imagery. Where does the author "fit" in this metaphor? (60-61) because she needed one more that I did." Is it possible for a child to 17. "I became her mother a parent? How? (60)
  17. Exactly what does Edith expect Fern to escape? What does the author hope to escape? Are obtainable? (61) either's hopes re
  18. What did the weekend skiing trip reveal about Edith's capacity to experience happiness? (61)
  19. Fern claims she became her mother's "past...present and...future." How is this possible? (61)
  20. The author claims the past, even an unknown past, "exacted a toll on her." What has Fern lost to the pa
  21. The author yearns to give birth to a daughter. What are Fern's wishes for her yet unborn child? A re her hope realistic? obtainable? (61-62)

## Chapter 5 – Activities

1. How much do you actually know of your parents' past? Is it possible to sense something about the past without actually knowing it?
2. Create a "map" of the most important emotions you have

about your parents. Your map can be of a person, a mind, a heart, or any other form that lends itself to creative mapping and imagery of emotional terrain.

3. Create an artistic project which focuses on your name. With your name presented dramatically (it should be an obvious focus of your work), consider including the following topics: What does your name mean? How did you obtain your name? What is your attitude about your name? Do you have more than one name? Would you ever consider changing your name?
4. Have you, or a family member or friend, ever experienced depression? What were the symptoms? What were the responses?
5. In poetry, written expression or music, reveal your attitude about suicide.
6. Create your artistic interpretation of Edith as she bolted from her bedroom. 10
7. Create an artistic expression which combines Nazi imagery and modern reactions to Nazi imagery. Your completed project may be either abstract or concrete. Try to incorporate your point of view of this theme.
8. Bring a photograph, film, or video recording of yourself in a family setting which "tells" or "shows" much more than just what the film/photo depicts. What "realities" are on display?
9. Create a project which focuses on your mother. If you can, include photographs, quotations, recipes, clothing, language habits and music in your presentation. Make her come alive as best you can.

10. What does it mean to be a "good mother"? a "good father"? Have you met adults whom you consider to be good mothers or fathers? What qualities do they possess that would have you give them the label of being "good"?
11. What occurs to both mother and child when a mother "centers her life" around a child?
12. Try to discover what you "are," what you mean to your parents. What are your feelings about your understanding of your place in their lives.
13. Describe an experience where you had to take care of one of your parents. How comfortable are you with this role?
14. Historians and psychologists differ on how past pain should be treated. One school of thought encourages people to escape or forget past pain and, as quickly as possible, get on with living. The other school warns against forgetting, saying that one should never want to completely escape the past. Which school of thought is closest to your own philosophy?
15. How much do parents truly "owe" their children? What do children truly "owe" their parents? 16. Are there population groups in our nation today who still have a "toll" exacted on them because of the past? Who are these people, what are their pasts and what price have they paid? Can these groups ever "escape" their pasts?
16. How long do you think the world will feel the impact of World War II? What impact do you think the Holocaust will have on Fern's children? on you? on your own children?
17. Abraham Lincoln once said: "Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history." In writing or in art, create a project which examines this quotation.

## **Chapter 6 (63-74)**

A problematic newspaper headline announcing Edith's return triggers her lifelong feelings of being "unwanted and unlovable," that she was "to blame" for the past. Hans attempts to explain the headline and assuage Edith's fears. The two women join Hans as he pays respects to his son, buried in the meticulously maintained Stockstadt cemetery. This visit elicits questions from the author about the Jewish cemetery and a serious contemplation about her maternal grandmother, Frieda, her namesake. Despite her earnest desire to learn about her Westerfeld roots, Fern receives only an ambiguous, cryptic response from Hans, who reluctantly allows that he will "tell the truth" only when he is ready to do so.

### **Chapter 6 - Discussion Questions**

1. What impact does the newspaper headline have on Edith and Fern? What burdens does it place on both women? (pp. 64-66)
2. Describe Edith's hopes that inspired her to return to Germany. The author comments that her mother felt "she was to blame for what had happened so many years ago." What occurred to Edith's personality as a result of her feelings of being "unwanted and unlovable"? (66-67)
3. Is a "need to be needed" a sign of mental health or mental/emotional impairment? Justify your answer using Edith as the example. (66-67)
4. How does Hans explain the newspaper headline? Whose interpretation is closest to your own? Is Edith being oversensitive or is Hans being obtuse and uncaring? (67-69)
5. What strategies does Hans employ to convince Edith to remain for the reunion? Ought he have shared this critical information at an earlier time? (69-70)

6. Where does Mina reside? Why, in your opinion, does she no longer live in the community. Why was she not invited to the reunion? (69-70)
7. Compare and contrast Stockstadt's cemetery with cemeteries in your community. Which culture, German or American, in your opinion, has a more convincing philosophy toward cemetery purpose and maintenance? (71-72)
8. What information does Hans have about the Jewish cemetery? Does his response surprise you? (72)
9. What compels Fern to so urgently "need to invent a relationship" with her maternal grandmother, Frieda, after whom she is named? Why is the author so hungry for specific details? (73)
10. Hans cannot directly respond to the author's quiet request for information about Frieda Westerfeld. Why? What prompted Fern to inquire about the last time Hans saw her? What was Hans' response? (73-74)
11. What does the author foreshadow when she informs us that Hans will "tell the truth" when he is ready to do so? (74)

## **Chapter 6 – Activities**

1. Rewrite the newspaper headline which so upset Edith and Fern. You must be concise, economical and factual in your use of words.
2. Present a report on a person (whom you directly or indirectly) whom you consider to be extremely unselfish. How did your chosen person develop his/her altruism?
3. Create a dialogue between you and Hans in which you

explain Edith's point of view. Try to assist him in understanding Edith and to persuade him to accept her point of view.

4. Fern describes her mother as a person who would "hurt herself before she disappoints others." Has there ever been a time in your life where you deliberately placed the needs of others in front of your own?
5. When was the last time you visited a cemetery? For what purpose(s) did you go? What was the emotional atmosphere at the time of your visit?
6. How does your religion/culture treat death, burial and afterlife? What would you want to happen to you after your death?
7. Create a tombstone, gravestone or commemorative marker for yourself. Include whatever information or symbols you deem appropriate for your memorial.
8. How is the death of a child (regardless of age) especially difficult for a parent? 12

## **Chapter 7 (75-91)**

After a symbolic, abortive encounter with a former friend of her sister, Edith spends time in her childhood home. The visit kindles divergent reactions. The current owner must confront issues of complicity and historical responsibility; Edith rediscovers acute memories of home, family and a surprisingly deep Jewish identity. In turn, the author must face her lack of religious training and her still unformed Jewish identity. Continuing in their quest to find the Jewish cemetery, Fern and Edith discover local German indifference and hostility towards their search. Despite being warned, "You shouldn't go there," the two women persist, and the author discusses themes of historical amnesia and German-Jewish identity. Finally, the women find the cemetery and have a revealing conversation with the caretaker's wife, a Jew whose experiences illustrate the German/Jewish identity dichotomy. Unkept and abandoned, the Jewish grave sites stand in sharp contrast to the immaculate larger cemetery. The women and Hans discover Edith's family's grave sites; Edith and Fern have profound, distinct responses. The author yearns even more to learn of Frieda as the three leave small commemorative pebbles on the now refurbished gravesites.

### **Chapter 7 - Discussion Questions**

1. Who is Klara Franz? What is her reaction to meeting Edith? What symbolic purpose does she serve? (pp. 75-77)
2. The author focuses on Klara's hands and fingers. On one occasion, Klara clutches "dead plants, roots and leaves." What purpose does the author serve by describing not only Klara's hands, but the objects of her hands' actions? (76-77)
3. Describe the metamorphosis of Edith's childhood home. What compelled Edith to remember her home? (78)

4. The home's owner, Frey, is defensive and nervous upon meeting Edith. Why? (79)
5. Is the term "owner" appropriate for Frey? What constitutes "ownership" of a home? Does Frey have any to Edith? (79)
6. Fern wonders about Frey's father's innocence. What is she suggesting? (79)
7. Edith's recollections of her childhood home are several and textured with significance. Describe them. (79)
8. To what extent is Edith's Jewish identity kindled by her visit to her home? (80-81)
9. The author uses the succah as a metaphor for Edith's home. Analyze the comparison, discover the implicit irony in its usage. (80)
10. An "old wooden beam" carries personal, historical and religious significance to Edith and Fern. Describe the level meaning of the beam to both the author and her mother. (81)
11. In a candid admission, Fern confesses she "received no religious training and cannot read a word of Hebrew." How did this occur and who/what is responsible? b) Is Fern "Jewish"? If so, why; if not, what not? c) What do you think the author's attitude is about her religious upbringing and identity? (81)
12. After the war, Edith's attitude about religion changed. How did she change and how did she not change? (81) 13
13. Fern quotes the poet Liesl Mueller, who asserts people can

- "be very cruel," yet "later ... sentimentalize the people we have injured." What does the poet mean? Are there examples in American history of Mueller's assertions? (81)
14. Describe the impact of Edith's descent into the home's original foundation. Why is smell so powerful to Edith? What happens when she lets the dirt floor slip through her fingers? (82-83)
  15. Edith claims she feels like a "celebrity" in her return to Stockstadt. Is this an accurate descriptive word of her reception there? If not, what is she? How ought she be treated? (84)
  16. Mention of the Jewish cemetery elicits various reactions. Describe them. (85) One man warns Edith, "You shouldn't go there." Go where? Why? Should Edith heed his advice? (85)
  17. What is Edith's stated purpose for visiting the Jewish cemetery? What are her unstated purposes? (84)
  18. Why are people unable to look Edith "in the eye" when she talks to them about the Jewish cemetery? (85)
  19. For what purpose does the author include the caretaker's wife's story? What is your attitude about her decision to return to Germany? (87)
  20. Why are so many Germans unwilling to look at the past, to talk about it, to "act as if they didn't know anything" (87)
  21. "We just didn't know." Explain and discuss this sentence. (87)
  22. Why does the caretaker's wife say: "I am German"? What is she implying through this declaration? (87)

- to restate what ought be obvious?
23. The author uses specific language to contrast the condition of the Jewish cemetery with the larger public cemetery which it is a part. What images does the author employ in her description? (88 -91)
  24. The author mentions that not only are Jewish graves physically unkept, they have been spiritually abandoned. Discuss the significance of these acts of forgetting. (89)
  25. In your opinion, what obligation does Germany have towards Jewish gravesites? (89)
  26. Why is the author suffused with guilt at the cemetery? (90)
  27. Describe Edith's response to her discovery of family members buried in the cemetery. What is her response to her daughter? (89-90)
  28. What occurs to Fern as a result of the visit? Why does she yearn to find Frieda, her grandmother? What does this most influence the author's selection of Motherland as the title of her memoir? (90 -91)
  29. Edith's memory of her grandfather results in recollection of a quip he made about Hitler. Describe his pun upon its accuracy. (90-91)
  30. What does Edith do to commemorate her visit to the gravesite? What does Hans do? What are your reactions to their responses? (91)

## Chapter 7 – Activities

1. Sketch a hand or a pair of hands either at rest or at work or play. Try to invest your hand(s) with symbolic purpose.

2. Has your home (or room) undergone significant change? Describe the change(s). What occurs to the character of a home after metamorphosis. [Photographs could aid the verbal description.]

3. In a poem, dialogue or essay, answer the following question: "To what extent do children inherit their parents' guilt or responsibility for past transgressions?"

4. Discover what a succah is. Draw, create and write about your discovery.

5. To what extent is your home linked with your identity? What important memories are home related?

6. What does it mean to be Jewish? What does it mean to be an adherent of any faith?

7. What is your religious background? How religious do you consider yourself? Are you more or less religious than earlier state of your life? Would you ever consider changing or abandoning your faith? For what purposes or reasons?

8. Invite a rabbi to your class to speak with students about Jewish religious practices, cultural traditions, be

9. Respond to the following assertion: "People become more religious when faced with crisis, loss or pain."

10. Create a story from smell. How sensitive are you to smell?

What is our culture's attitude

towards odor

Create a project which treats smell and culture.

11. Have you ever heard voices you know were not there? What

causes a person to hear voices?

What reactions

towards people who hear them?

12. Edith mentions her grandfather's name is Kahn. Research the

name Kahn and discover is

Jewish significance.

13. Create a collage or artistic project on the following sentences:

"We knew nothing about this."

"We just didn't know."

14. What "duty" or "obligation" do victims of wrong have -- to

themselves, to their community, to ~~past~~, to the future?

15. Is it possible to be a dual or multi-national/ethnic/racial

person? What are the joys and pains of

such an identity?

16. America has long prided itself on being a "melting pot," where

ethnic differences are

historically repeated by

an American identity. How accurate is this notion

and are you in

agreement with it?

17. In a poem, essay or artistic expression, create a project on the

following thematic question:

"What is an American?"

18. Are there population groups that simply cannot become

"American" or have been rejected

from blending into the

American "melting pot"?

19. Discuss the significance of Memorial Day. How does it relate

to Edith and Fern?

20. Two of the oldest, most enduring of Jewish moral obligations

are remembrance and memory.

Analyze these ob

reference to the condition of the Jewish cemetery in Chapter 7.

21. Create an artistic interpretation of Simon Wiesenthal's commentary: "Hope lives when people rem em ber."

22. Learn why Jews use stones to "pay respects" to the dead. React to this mourning custom.

23. What, in your opinion, is the best way to memorialize the dead? Create a written or artistic expression of your answer.

24. Are there any public memorials in your community? Research their origin and describe your reaction to it/them.

25. Create your own public or private memorial to a person, group or people of your choice. What would it look like? How would you want people to react while "visiting" there?

26. Have you ever spoken with a dead person? Describe your conversation and/or emotional responses.

## **Chapter 8 (92-104)**

Before attending the much-anticipated reunion, Edith revisits a favorite childhood spot near the Rhein River. Hans produces "yellowed, crumbling" documents with Sigmund Westerfeld's signature. This disclosure has a moving impact on Fern. Initially nervous at the reunion, Edith faces a room dense with an "awkward silence," its participants full of "discomfort, chagrin, shame." Reluctant to look directly at her, Edith's former classmates even appear physically different than the nicely-dressed Edith. Breaking the tension with a quip about ageing, Edith permits her former classmates to approach her individually at the end of the reunion; they beseech her memory for recollection. Several testify to her family's dignity, generosity and civic leadership. Underscoring these re-acquaintances is the issue of the past, and the author explores the question of remembrance and its purposes. Fern recognizes that Edith's classmates were only children themselves when her mother was forced to leave Stockstadt; how much moral responsibility can the adult Fern ascribe to these now elderly Germans? Despite the appearance of success, not all of Edith's classmates attended the reunion, a fact which gives both Fern and Edith pause.

### **Chapter 8 - Discussion Questions**

1. Visiting a childhood "favorite spot" near the Rhein River results in a dual-level response from Edith. Describe each. (pp. 92-93)
2. What impact does Siegmund Westerfeld's signature have on Fern? What questions cross her mind as a result? (93)
3. For what purpose does the author include mention of "yellowed ... crumbling, dog-eared" pages? (93)

4. Why is Edith described as "nervous" at the onset of the reunion? (94)
5. The class president welcomes Edith's return but is greeted with "an awkward silence" full of "discomfort, chagrin, shame." Analyze the "awkward silence" in terms of each of these three descriptive words. (95)
6. Why are Edith's classmates initially reluctant to "look directly" at her? (95)
7. What is a "Spatgeborene"? Are these Germans truly "lucky"? (95)
8. Though Edith initially feels out of place, the author notes Edith's appearance in dress do the women's appearances reveal about their lives? (97) distinguishes
9. Edith quips about getting older and this breaks the tension at the reunion. Why did the author suggest that the much tension that the group felt it was about "to witness an execution"? Whose execution? (97) suggest that the
10. Ingrid Kraft is the first person to greet Edith personally. Who is Ingrid and what symbolic importance does she represent? (97-98) importance
11. Why are the classmates driven to ask Edith, "Do you remember me?" (97-99) 16
12. Berta Busch and Karl Schumacher reveal an important aspect of the Westerfeld family's character with their reminiscences. What common qualities do Busch and Schumacher remember about the Westerfelds? (98-99)
13. Describe and judge the American presence in Stockstadt after

## World War II. (100-101)

14. A classmate turns to Edith and beseeches her to "forget the bad things of the past." What should Edith say to and why do her classmates want to forget? (101)
15. The author raises a serious question when she considers the age of Edith's classmates at the time of Edith's parents' decision to save her in 1938. Discuss the ethical and practical impact of this question. (101-102)
16. In what ways did Edith's classmates suffer during World War II? Do you agree that some were victims "in their own way"? (101-102) Should children always do what their parents tell them to do?
17. By most appearances, the reunion was successful. However, Hans introduces a fact that the author uses to make a question the success of the event. What is that fact and what are your reactions to his admission. (103)
18. Why do you suppose some of Edith's classmates refused to attend the reunion? (103-104)

## Chapter 8 – Activities

1. Research your family's history to see if your family possesses any old documents. If you discover such, what do the documents reveal about your personal history?
2. What document(s) would you want your children (and their children) to keep in order to help to explain your life?
3. Ask your parents to describe any class reunions they may have attended. Encourage them to discuss their emotional state of mind before, during and after the reunion.

4. Class reunions are supposed to be joyous gatherings. Why are so many people reluctant to attend? Present your answer as a dialogue, story, essay or artistic project.
5. Suppose the class president made you responsible for gathering gifts to present to Edith at the reunion. What gifts would you have included?
6. What responsibilities do American soldiers legally have as warriors in a different country? socially? ethically?
7. Research the topic: children born to American soldiers and women of countries in which the soldiers were stationed.
8. In a written or artistic project, describe or depict a "war victim".
9. In a poem, dialogue or narrative, describe a time where you questioned or challenged your parents.
10. At what age do you believe children may be held accountable for their actions? For example, children ought be responsible to: set their own time schedules (sleeping, eating, etc.) drive, sign legally-binding contracts, select their own friends, date, engage in sexual behaviors, marry, join the military
11. Is it easier or more difficult for adults to give up prejudices than young people?

atw hat age do

## **Chapter 9 (105-111)**

This short, quiet, confessional chapter features Hans confronting his past and the author's use of his admission to explore the themes of complicity, moral responsibility, atonement and forgiveness. Invited to Hans' home, Fern and Edith notice their host's tense, preoccupied state of mind. Hans produces a recent newspaper article which he insists on reading aloud. It is part historical narrative of the Westerfeld family, part autobiographical confession. In a shaken voice, Hans described how Stockstadt "looked away" from the anti-Jewish degradations suffered by the Westerfelds. Prejudice and economic jealousies fueled the townspeople's indifference to and participation in the cruelties and violence done Edith's family. He recounts Edith's grandmother's tragic, pure commitment to Germany; he meticulously details the events of Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938). His recounting reaches its climax in 1942 when a desperate, destitute Frieda begs Hans for help. Now a proud marine, Hans turns away, and, in so doing, consigns himself to a lifetime of suppressed shame, moral culpability and remorse. He breaks down in front of Edith and Fern, and, although not forgiving, Edith gently asks him to stop. He cannot; he has been punished by memory, "condemned" by his knowledge that he became "bound" to Edith and her family "because we did nothing." The author's decision to permit Hans's voice to predominate signals her understanding that the moral issues of memory and responsibility heighten, rather than subside, over time.

### **Chapter 9 - Discussion Questions**

1. In what ways does the author show how "tense and preoccupied" Hans is? (p. 106)
2. Describe the author's reaction to the newspaper "Darmstadter Echo." What does she lead the reader to expect? (106)

3. Hans stutters when he reads, "The townspeople all...looked away." Why did this sentence pose such difficulty for him? (107)
4. Why do you feel Hans selected this moment to share his "delicate" truth with Edith and Fern? (107)
5. Describe what occurred to Edith's family from 1935-1945. (107-111)
6. What economic motive may have caused many people's indifference to the Westerfelds? (108)
7. Sara presents a simple, single reason as to why she refused to leave Germany. What is her reason and to what do you admire or disagree with her position. (108)
8. Why is Hans so meticulous in detailing the events of "Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938)? Which details of the dispossession of the Westerfeld family most upset you? (108-109)
9. What was Hans' age at the time of "Kristallnacht"? Does his age explain or excuse his reaction? (109)
10. In 1942, Hans once again sees Frieda. a) Describe the circumstances of their meeting .b) What was Hans' position at the time of the meeting and what attitude did he have about his position? c) In what condition was Frieda? d) What was Hans' response? What descriptive words does the author employ to describe Hans' reaction? (109-110)
11. Edith softly tells Hans to stop it, to "forget it." Why does she wish him to stop? Is this an admirable or inappropriate offer? (110)

12. What is the significance of Hans' admission that he "can't forget"? (110)
13. How did the past come alive for Hans? (110) 18
14. In your opinion, what caused greater stress for Hans: keeping his story alive in his mind but not revealing it or sharing his story with Edith and Fern? (110-111)
15. What does Hans feel he "owes" Edith and Fern? What do you feel he owes them? What, if anything, do they "owe" him? (110-111)
16. Explain the sentence: "We became bound to her because we did nothing." (111)
17. Edith suggests that Hans may be asking forgiveness. What is his response to her question? (111)
18. Hans quietly states he has been punished for the past fifty years. What has been his punishment to be adequate? (111) punishment?
19. Discuss the meaning of the phrase: "condemned by memory." (111)

## Chapter 9 - Activities

1. All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. Indifference to evil is evil. There are two kinds of silence: destructive silence and constructive silence. He who saves one person acts as if to save all mankind. In times of moral extremity, we must act as if saving a single life is the very center of the moral universe. Create a written or artistic expression of any one of the above sentences.

2. What is forgiveness? In what ways is it similar and/or different than atonement?
3. Describe a time when your conscience was "guilty." What had you done to provoke a burdened con  
you do to ease your conscience?
4. Define the idea of "complicity." Is there any such thing as an "innocent bystander" during times of racial, ethn  
religious persecution?
5. Discover the meaning and significance of the Hebrew phrase "tikkun olam." In a written or artistic express  
project which focuses on that term.
6. What is "confession"? Describe the religious, social and spiritual significance of confession. To whom and  
purposes does one confess?
7. In a creative project, examine the phrase: "the townspeople all looked the other way." What do you think they  
when they looked the other direction?
8. Hans' description of "Kristallnacht" is terribly personal. This is a remembrance of destruction - of Jew ish life c  
felt level. It brings to mind Judith Miller's examination of the Holocaust, "One by One by One." How does the author use Hans' confession to become symbolic of the entire catastrophe of the Holocaust?
9. Write a letter to Hans in which you offer him advice as to what he ought have done when he encountered Frieda in 1942?
10. Was Hans' action towards the Westerfelds "evil"? Is he as culpable as an actual murderer? Why or why not?

11. Should countries attempt to write laws that require people to do good things and punish them if they do not act honorably in times of moral stress?
12. Are there different levels of guilt and responsibility in the Holocaust? What do you think these levels are?
13. Is Hans a "war criminal"? Analyze the reasons for your judgment. Has he committed an actual, "real crime"?
14. What are the purposes of memory?
15. In a poem, short story, dialogue or narrative, describe a time in your life that centered around: forgiveness atonement absolution.

## Chapter 10 (112-139)

Renewing an intimate childhood relationship with the reclusive Mina becomes a moral imperative for Edith, who sets out with Fern to locate Mina in her secluded home in the remote Odenwald Mountains. Unknown to even those who live nearby, Mina resides in a dilapidated "inn" which matches her deteriorating physical condition. "A bag lady with a home," Mina provokes a deep emotional resonance in Edith, whom Mina lovingly calls "Tiddy," an early, affectionate nickname for Edith. Mina and Edith are polarities in terms of memory; where Edith has submerged and repressed the past, Mina has welded it permanently to her consciousness. To Mina, the past has never disappeared; she is a living oral testimony to wrong. Mina's encyclopedic memory even pertains to a ring Fern wears; Mina corrects Edith's version of its origins. Mina's relationship with the Westerfeld family occurred from economic necessity. Her family's poverty compelled Mina to serve as live-in-help in the Westerfeld home; her growing affection for Edith resulted in a relationship so loving that both women regarded the other as a sister. Angry, embittered and outraged, Mina is astounded by Edith's lack of recall. Denouncing the perpetrators as "Schweinehunde," Mina details, recounts and condemns the wrongs done Edith and her family. Incapable of forgetting and unforgiving, Mina, to the author, acts "as if through memory she is consoled." Early on, Mina stood up to the Nazis, and, as a result, received both physical and emotional scars. Nonetheless, in an electrifying epigram, she still trumpets resistance. "I will never howl with those wolves." Incredulous and admiring, Fern lauds Mina as Stockstadt's "only voice of opposition, resistance and conscience." Yet Mina deflects Fern's praise, preferring to simply evaluate her moral tenacity as an adherence to basic human decency. For that integrity, Mina paid a terrible price: ostracism, discrimination, isolation -- a lifetime banishment from her community. Throughout this extensive retelling of the past, Edith yearns to discover the truth of her

parents' history, which Mina reveals with heartbreaking subtlety. In an act of personal and historical transcendence, "with unspeakable tenderness," Mina presents Fern a Westerfeld heirloom, a miniature tea set Mina and Edith played with as children. It is not merely an artifact, but an organic part of Fern's past, which Mina enjoins Fern to "tell" to her yet unborn child, whom Mina hopes to be a daughter.

### **Chapter 10 - Discussion Questions**

1. What reason(s) does Hans provide for not accompanying Edith and Fern on their visit to Mina? (pp. 112-113)
2. Analyze why Hans is so uncomfortable even with the mention of Mina's name? (113)
3. Describe the author's initial reaction to the Odenwald Mountains. What are her first emotional responses to the scenery? (113)
4. How well known is Mina near her home in Tromm? What do you suppose accounts for this? (114)
5. What purpose did Mina's inn serve? Describe the irony implicit in the inn's current condition. (115)
6. Edith provides a physical description of Mina as a girl. To what extent does it match Fern's description of M in current condition? (115) 20
7. Who is "Tiddy"? (116)
8. To what extent does Mina mirror the physical condition of her home? (116) Why do you suppose she liv
9. What imagery and descriptive language does the author use

- to describe Edith's initial encounter with M i
10. Analyze the descriptive writing in the last paragraph on page 116 and subsequent paragraphs on page 117. What psychological understandings are you receiving through the author's -physical descriptions. (116)
  11. The author is drawn to Mina by a comparison Mina makes regarding Fern. What is this comparison and what emotional impact does it have on the author? (117-118)
  12. The author calls Mina "a bag lady with a home." Analyze the physical and emotional accuracy of that categorization (117)
  13. Early in her conversation with Edith and Fern, Mina demonstrates two examples of astonishing clarity of memory. Describe each. (118)
  14. What was your reaction in learning that Edith gave Fern incorrect information regarding her -going? (118)
  15. Mina calls the perpetrators "Schweinehunde" and "Schweinische Leute." What do these terms mean? Is it appropriate for Mina to be this angry so many years later? Why is she so angry? Should Fern share her anger? (118-119)
  16. How did Mina come to be a member of the Westerfeld household? What are your reactions to this living arrangement? (119-120)
  17. Why does Mina repeatedly ask Edith, "Do you remember?" What was Edith's response? What are your reactions to the two women's different approaches to memory? (120)

18. The sight of Frieda smiling results in an epiphany to the author. What is Fern's realization? (120-121) What impact would this have had on her?
19. Mina and Edith represent polarities on the issue of memory. Describe how the author portrays this difference. (120-121)
20. Why is Edith "intent but distant" as Mina recreates the past? (121-122)
21. Not only is Mina incapable of forgetting, she is adamant about remembering. "There are so many things I can never forgive." Why is Mina so unforgiving? (122-139)
22. Edith's initial shared memory of her childhood involves her sister Betty and a mandolin recital. Why does this memory have symbolic importance? (122)
23. The author suggests Mina seeks to remember everything "as if through memory she is consoled." Why does she do this? Is Mina's attitude towards the past healthy or not? (123)
24. Describe Mina's reaction when the public swimming pool is closed to Jews. (125)
25. Some people have said that large moral discoveries often result from seemingly small actions or situations. What moral rule did Mina announce as a result of the swimming pool incident? What relationship does this incident have to Edith as a consequence? (125)
26. Describe the origin of the half-inch long, "slightly indented" scar Mina has on the bridge of her nose. What symbolic purpose does the scar serve? (124)

27. How deeply did Edith's departure affect Mina? Provide your own estimate of the intensity of feeling Mina has for Edith. (124-125) 21
28. What occurred to Mina the day Edith departed? (125)
29. Why did Mina not write Edith and explain what had been happening to her? (125)
30. Edith confesses that because Mina wasn't Jewish, Mina would be "safe." What factors would have led Edith to this conclusion? As an adult, what are her reactions to Mina's revelations? -125
31. Of the many cruelties, indignities and wrongs the Westerfeld family endured after Edith's departure, which, in your opinion, was the most damaging? (126-127)
32. In what ways did Mina's mother resist the Nazis? What is your judgment of Mina's mother? (127)
33. The author is surprised by her grandmother's invocation of God when Mina helped an injured man and Frieda's invocation and why was the author surprised by it? On a Sara. W ha
34. Mina's resistance often took place with her refusal to do certain things. What were some of the actions M i to do? (128 )
35. What does "howling with those wolves" mean? For what purpose does the author include this phrase in her (128)
36. The author describes Mina as being Stockstadt's "only voice of opposition, resistance and conscience." (128) How do Mina represent each of those terms? b) What were the

- consequences of being that kind of individual? c) What "basic moral questions" did Mina raise? d) What effect did she have on the townspeople?
37. Astonished by Mina's moral courage, the author pressed Mina for reasons why. What does Mina's self-evaluation reveal about her? (129)
  38. Mina has a different perspective on the reunion. What is her reaction and why does she maintain her position? (129)
  39. On page 130, Mina and Edith express marked and dramatically different perspectives on the past. a) Describe each woman's point of view, citing specific sentences to support your response. b) Whose philosophy is closest to your own? c) Whose philosophy is emotionally more healthy? mature? just?
  40. In an overpowering litany, Mina details her life under Nazi rule. Describe what occurred to her from 1941 on. Select one event which you believe is representative of her experiences. (130-139)
  41. In order to marry, what did Mina have to prove? (131)
  42. Mina had a chance to outfit her newborn son Jurgen with new clothes and other neonatal provisions. What action did she take and why did she do so? What is your opinion of her decision? (132)
  43. Describe Mina's relationship with Paul. Are there any circumstances that confuse, inspire or challenge you?
  44. Throughout Mina's extended monologue, one question looms in Edith's mind. What is this core question and taken so long to be asked? (133)

45. What happened to Edith's parents? (134-136)
46. Under the most extreme circumstances, Frieda was concerned for Mina's welfare. How do you account for her selflessness? (135-136) 22
47. Mina never directly tells Edith her parents were murdered. Given her obsession with detail and her meticulous precision with facts, why does she not conclude her narrative with a factual accounting of the death of Edith's parents? (136)
48. To Fern, Mina and Edith "seem like sisters." In what ways does the author show this relationship? (137 and entire chapter)
49. Explain the phrase: "whose foundation is shared history." (137)
50. When Mina presents Fern with a ring, Mina provides a reason for her generosity. Describe this reason and discuss your reaction to it. (137-138)
51. What is the significance of the tea set? (138)
52. Explain the subtle difference between "Maybe you would like these?" and "Maybe 'you' would like these?" (138)
53. Fern describes Mina's handling of the tea set as being done with "unspeakable tenderness." What emotions does this phrase evoke in the reader? (139)
54. Human experience embraces the past, present and future. Describe how the tea set exchange encapsulates the human experience. (139)
55. Analyze the final sentence of the chapter. Which word, words

or phrase is the most important?

## Chapter 10 – Activities

1. What does it mean to be a "hero"? In *Motherland*, are there any heroes? What actions or qualities make them heroic? Create a project which distinguishes between celebrity and heroism. The United States has been criticized as honoring celebrity and pretending that celebrities are actually heroes. Is this a true or valid criticism?
2. Create a poem, short story, song, dialogue or sketch around the idea of ostracism.
3. Why are people ostracized? Are there individuals in your school who are shunned, set apart or disdained? What caused this social isolation?
4. Are you acquainted with anyone who lives in a remote area? Describe their surroundings and attempt to explain why they have chosen to live as far removed as they do.
5. Create a project which illustrates Mina's remote state of being: physically, socially and spiritually.
6. Almost every child has a story of a "strange" person living in the neighborhood. In an oral story, poem or drawing create an image of the stranger in your midst.
7. The Beatles sang about a "Nowhere Man." Why is Mina invisible to her neighbors?
8. Would you ever want to live by yourself for a prolonged period of time? What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of such a living arrangement?

9. Create a project around a "bag-lady." Focus on small details.
10. Have you ever spoken with a "bag-lady" or a "recluse"? What insights did you gain about life from your conversation?
11. Sketch Mina's hands and eyes as described by the author on pages 116-117.
12. Discover more about the Jewish practices of "yahrzeit" in commemorating the anniversary of a loved one's death. Should we encourage or discourage a practice of remembering death anniversaries? 23
13. The author uses the exact German wording of Mina's curses. Was it more or less effective for the author to include the precise German curse even though most of her reading audience does not speak or read German?
14. What curses, idiomatic expressions or catch-phrases do you know in a language other than English? Which of these phrases have successfully "crossed over" into standard English usage?
15. Is there a relative whose appearance resembles yours? Bring a photograph or a written description of that relative so that your classmates may observe the similarities. What is your personal reaction to this resemblance?
16. Just how important is the past to you? Recreate a childhood memory as Mina did for Edith.
17. Muller is a bully in addition to being a city official and a Nazi. What qualities does a bully have? What makes people become bullies? Are there bullies at your school? What does your school do in response? What suggestions would you offer to combat bullying?

18. Use any one of the several German phrases used on pages 122-123 as the basis of a poster issue raised by the phrase. Make your artwork become its own statement using not only German but any other language you deem necessary to make your point.
19. Rabbi Hillel, when asked to describe being Jewish while standing on one foot, said, "That which is hateful to yourself, do not unto others." How does his statement reflect Mina's life? To what extent does it mirror your own?
20. Research the Book of Ruth in the Bible. To what extent does the biblical tale reflect the relationship of Mina to Edith? To what extent does the analogy break down?
21. Create a project which focuses on the following idea: Quiet courage is often the hardest to demonstrate and the most difficult to achieve.
22. Write a note, poem, song or letter to a friend in which you try to explain the nature of your feelings of the depth of linkage with that person.
23. Prepare a research project on Germans who resisted the Nazis. The organization called "The White Rose" might be of particular interest as an example of a student resistance organization. (Walt Disney produced a film entitled "Swing Kids" which explored this theme of citizen resistance to Nazi control. Describe the risks inherent in resisting evil.
24. Have you ever resisted a governmental law, order or rule? How, why, and where did your resistance occur? What happened as a result of your action?
25. Have you ever had a crisis of faith where you doubted or challenged the existence of God? Describe this crisis and

which takes a

account for your subsequent response.

26. In an artistic or written/creative project, interpret Mina's declaration of resistance: "I will never howl with those wolves."
27. Have you ever met, either in person or through the media, a person of "opposition, resistance and conscience"? Describe him/her/them.
28. List at least five "basic moral questions" you have begun to ask yourself about your own life and the life of your community or nation.
29. What does it mean to be a "good" person? Describe how schools can help create "goodness." 24
30. In your religion, moral upbringing or study of literature and history, are there any figures in the past who suffered unfairly for the basic reason of their goodness? How does your religion, moral training or study of the past explain the presence of good standing up to evil?
31. In a dialogue, poem or song, answer the following question: Why weren't/aren't there more Minas in the world.
32. Create a poster which illustrates Mina's ("I will never make peace with them and I will never forget...") or Edith's ("You've got to put the past in the past.") view of history and memory. In your poster, be sure to include your viewpoint on remembrance, memory, forgiveness and history.
33. Examine the phrase "politically undesirable." What images does the phrase evoke? Research the idea of "blacklisting." Has this practice occurred in our history? Are there "politically undesirables" in our land today?

34. Research the ways the United States practiced the same type of restrictions on "intermarriage" that the Nazis practiced. What peoples were affected by our restrictive practices? What terms did the United States use to label this marriage restriction?
35. What is a "displaced person"? In a poem, dialogue or artistic project, present your understandings. [This topic lends itself to a "word chart," where the student creates a "mind map" displaying the meaning(s) of the component words of the phrase "displaced person."]
36. You have read ten chapters of "Motherland." What is your core question, the one question you find yourself asking over and over, as you read the memoir.
37. Create an artistic interpretation of the idea that humans have their closest links when their "foundation is shared history." Pay careful attention to the symbolic potential of "foundation" and the intriguing idea of a "shared" history.
38. Fern is not Mina's daughter, but Mina feels she is. In this sense, Fern is Mina's "fictive kin." Is there "fictive kin" in your family? How did this occur? How intense is this "fictive" relationship? Why do people invent "fictive kin" in the first place?
39. Write a letter to the author in which you offer advice as to what she ought do with the effects Mina has given her.
40. The author is six months pregnant at the time of her meeting Mina. Mina hopes Fern will give birth to a daughter. What are your hopes?
41. In a drawing, painting or sketch, recreate the tea set in your own image.

42. To Edith and Fern, "telling" is an important Jewish obligation. It is almost a commandment: recall and recreate. Look at Mina's request of Fern at the end of the chapter. In what respects is Mina speaking as a Jew? Create a project which demonstrates your understanding of the phrase: "Tell her..."

rem em ber a

## **Chapter 11 (140-147)**

Lying next to her mother in their shared hotel bed, Fern learns of the "pivotal" event in Edith's life, her forced departure from her parents. This defining moment, which has reverberated in the author's own life, continues to cause confusion, pain and torment in Edith. This singular event becomes the fault line of her life; it is the absolute altering moment that terminated her childhood and consigned Edith to a life of existential despair. How could her parents send her away? Was it due to lack of love? Why continue living if one couldn't share life's experiences with one's beloved mother and father? To accept her parents' life-saving decision, Edith resigned herself to the fact that her "childhood" was over. Despite the author's compassionate, tender and persuasive arguments that Edith's parents acted out of love, Edith remains frozen in her childhood perception that her parents "sent her away." Edith's "understanding is stuck in a twelve-year-old's broken heart." This crucial gap between mother and daughter has no simple solution, as evidenced by Edith's unwillingness to answer her daughter's plaintive question as to whether Edith would have responded similarly to save Fern's life. Edith's life-long desperate fears of separation and abandonment darken all aspects of her life, and the author, using metaphor and allusion, now understands that her mother's life pivoted and still revolves around "the boat she could never get off."

### **Chapter 11 - Discussion Questions**

1. The author uses several metaphors to describe the "odd twist" between her mother and her as they are lying in bed. Which comparison strikes you as the most effective? (p. 140)
2. Exactly what is the "pivotal" event in Edith's life Fern so desperately needs to hear? Why is it the author's pivotal event

- as well? (141)
3. The night before her departure, Edith sleeps with her mother. What important revelation occurred between the two? (141)
  4. Edith is the second child her parents had to see depart. Would this even be easier or more difficult than saying farewell to their oldest daughter? (141)
  5. With as much supporting evidence as you can present, how much did Edith understand of the events of her day of departure? (142-143)
  6. Describe the behaviors of the numerous parents on the dock. Which reaction had the greatest impact on you? (143)
  7. Edith concluded her "childhood was over" on the day of her departure. Explain this comment and comment whether you are in agreement or disagreement with Edith's conclusion. (143)
  8. In a number of ways, Edith has yet to accept her parents' decision. List as many ways she either questions or rejects her parents' decision. (143-146)
  9. In an equal number of ways, the author attempts to convince her mother that Edith's parents acted properly. List as many of the arguments Fern presents to Edith. (144-146)
  10. Why does the adult Edith still believe that her parents "sent her away"? (143)
  11. Explain the parable Fern attempts to use in explaining to her mother the rationale used by Edith's parents daughter. (144-145)

12. The author notes that Edith's response to her being sent to America depended on her status as an escapee. How do you think the author feels that a survivor would respond differently than an escapee? (145)
13. Explain the imagery and intent of the sentence: "Her understanding is stuck in a twelve-year-old's broken heart." (145)
14. How does Edith respond when Fern asks her mother if she would have saved Fern in the circumstances of her parents in 1938? What is your reaction to Edith's response? (146)
15. Do the author and her mother resolve their serious differences on the departure issue? (146)
16. Has your opinion of Edith changed as a result of Chapter 11? 26
17. The author, in her own epiphany, accepts that both Frieda and Edith acted similarly in coping with serious challenges. How did both women similarly respond? (146)
18. What does Fern's first day at college reveal about the impact of the Holocaust on Edith's life? (147)
19. The author loves to use metaphors to explain or illuminate complicated, textured ideas. Explain the metaphor in her final sentence of Chapter 11: "The boat she could never get off." (147)

## **Chapter 11 – Activities**

1. Chapter 11 features several vivid visual images. Select one and recreate it in writing or some other artistic expression.

2. Fern and her mother Edith engage in a serious conversation, at times even bordering on a disagreement. Recreate, in story or in dialogue, a serious conversation with an adult in your life. 3. In bed, Fern describes a Venn diagram of the three visible generations of her family, and a fourth, invisible one. Create this Venn diagram .
3. In the conversation between Fern and her mother, whose argument or point of view is most convincing? In a brief paragraph, describe your response.
4. Write a letter to Edith in which you try to respond to her pain, guilt and feelings of responsibility. (Some students may choose to write a letter to Frieda, never to be received, in which they express their opinion about her decision.)
5. Sketch or artistically recreate Edith's point of view as being on board the boat which separated her from her parents.
6. Fern describes how she "fits" next to her mother. In a diagram, sketch, artistic rendering or creative writing piece, describe how you "fit" in your family.
7. Discover a "pivotal" event in a parent or honored adult's life and prepare a presentation to share with the class.
8. Have you experienced a "pivotal" moment in your life? What qualities made the moment pivotal?
9. Discuss how demonstrative you and your family are with their feelings. What are the various advantages or disadvantages of being too open or too closed with expressions of emotion?
10. Do you remember the last time you slept with your parent(s)? Describe the context of that event

11. Imagine yourself as a parent of a child you are in the process of sending away. Write a letter to your child explaining your decision. Try to explain how and why you will act on the day of departure.
12. In a poem, story or expository essay, describe a time of extreme sadness in your own life. Have you experienced that sadness? How/Why?
13. Describe a time where you rejected one of your parent's decisions.
14. Create either an artistic or written project which focuses on the following sentence: "Parents do what's best for children, even when it hurts them. It's an instinct to save your child."
15. Using the two sentence quotation in activity # 15 (above), debate whether or not that statement is accurate.
16. Is it possible for an adult to be "frozen in time," trapped by a childhood experience or memory? Recount an example from your own experience, films you have seen, books you have read or from your own imagination.
17. What does it mean to be a loving parent? How does a parent learn to love? What factors make it difficult for a parent to be loving?
18. What does it mean to be a loving son or daughter? What does a child "owe" his or her parents?
19. Describe, in a story, poem, or written narrative, a time when your parents "hurt" you in order to help you.
20. In an artistic expression, respond to the sentence: "Her

understanding is stuck in a twelve- year-old's broken heart."

21. Write an opinion piece for your school's newspaper which agrees or disagrees with the following assertion: "Parents should act to spare their children of their parents' fate."
22. What is "fate"? Do you believe in it? Are we fated to replicate our parents' lives?
23. In your opinion, how should parents respond to their children's first day of grade school? junior high school? senior high school? college?
24. Artistically or poetically interpret Edith's relationship with boats.
25. In what ways do children often misunderstand their parents? Why do misunderstandings resolve them?

occur? W hat

## **Chapter 12 (148-157)**

As the women prepare to depart Germany and return to America, Edith provides a sense of perspective to not only her return to Stockstadt, but the subsequent course of her life. A more settled and restored Edith is moved by a classmate's unexpected, touching airport visit. Fern learns more details of Edith's life as her mother recounts a small act of childhood resistance to Nazi discrimination. Edith describes her initial American experiences – arriving in New York City and viewing "Snow White" (which upsets the still traumatized child) at Radio City Music Hall. Edith takes a train to Chicago, where her father's brother has agreed to sponsor her. This living arrangement, however, is far from a loving recreation of family. Instead, her aunt Mildred treats Edith as little more than a nuisance, preferring to utilize the newly-arrived child as a maid. Suspicious and begrudging, aunt Mildred hastens Edith's Americanization outside the home; it will be painful school experiences and Chicago White Sox baseball that facilitate the young immigrant's absorption into her involuntarily-adopted newfound land. Stricken with panic at her inevitable forgetfulness of minute detail of her former German life, Edith is further broken by her receipt of a letter from Mina informing Edith of her parents' murder. Aunt Mildred's callous response only intensifies Edith's need to "block" memories. The author gently elicits her mother's reflections on her post-German experiences. Acknowledging the terribly limited, cramped lives of her Stockstadt classmates, Edith concedes she has lived a better life. Yet, "I paid a terrible price."

### **Chapter 12 - Discussion Questions**

1. How can one account for Edith's determination to drive at the end of her stay in Germany? (pp. 148-149)
2. Karl Schumacher comes to the airport to serve two purposes: one stated and one unstated. Describe both. (149-151)

3. What does the movie theater represent to Edith? What action did she take for the better part of one year regarding the movies? Who is the unspoken "hero" of her story? (151-152)
4. How much does the author know of her mother's early experiences in Chicago? Why did Edith refuse to share her American girlhood history with Fern? (152)
5. "Snow White" proves to be symbolically upsetting to the young Edith. Why? (153)
6. After concluding Chapter 12, was America "better" or "worse" for Edith? (153-158)
7. With whom did Edith live once in America? How much was Edith treated as "family"? (153- 158)
8. The author uses "Cinderella" as a metaphor for her mother's early Chicago experience. Is this an accurate metaphor? (154)
9. Edith pursues what appears to be an "all-American" activity to hasten her absorption into her new land. Describe the activity which she enjoyed on a weekly basis. (154)
10. School has been recognized as the single most powerful force in Americanizing immigrant children. Describe Edith's school experiences and discuss your reaction to her journeys as a student (155)
11. Edith reveals a sense of panic when she recounted her nightly ritual of re-inventing her German home in her new home. Exactly what caused this panic? (155-156)
12. What impact did learning of her parents' murder have on the teenaged Edith? (156)

13. Using specific detail from Chapter 12, select one or two words to describe Aunt Mildred. What words and what justification do you have for your selection?
14. Traveling to Germany provides Edith with perspective on her life. What conclusion, as an holder woman, do you draw about her life? Do you agree with her assessment? (157)
15. In what ways is Edith's American experience bittersweet? (156-157)

### Chapter 12 – Activities

1. Describe an instance where a person says one thing that carries multiple or layered meanings. Use another example to demonstrate how a person's tone can alter the meaning of a word.
2. Have you ever snuck into a movie, dance, ball game or concert? What were your motivations? What emotions did you feel as you were sneaking into the event? How different was your experience than that of Edith?
3. What was the most upsetting film you have ever seen? What accounts for your reaction?
4. How close are you to members of your "extended" family? Who encouraged or discouraged you? the degree of c  
you feel?
5. Research how baseball served as a powerful force in ethnic assimilation in the 1900-1950 era. Focus on the im p  
Hank Greenberg had on the Jewish community. What do you think Edith's reaction
6. What do you think school is like for a non-English speaker

who has recently arrived in the United States? Try  
interview a student or an adult who has recently arrived in the  
United States and has attended schools without extensive  
background in English. Share your findings with your  
classmates. In an opinion piece for your school or local  
newspaper, describe what 2 programs (if any) you feel  
should be made available to immigrant children to facilitate  
their understanding of English and American culture.

7. In a poem, short story or song, describe the emotional state of  
a person who has "lost" memory of a loved  
one's touch, smell or presence.
8. In an artistic project or some form of written expression,  
explain what it means to "pay a price" for something.
9. Most people yearn for a "good" or "better" life, if not for  
themselves, then surely for their children. In your  
opinion, what is a "good" life?

## **Chapter 13 (158-162)**

Fern gives birth four months after her return from Germany and is overwhelmed to learn that her newborn is a girl. Captivated by her daughter, Fern asks Edith whom the baby resembles but is deflated by her mother's evasive response. Yet, this historical amnesia is perceived positively by the author, who now holds a belief that Edith's commitment to the "present" is not only an avowal of faith in the child, but an act of hope for a new healthy, reconfigured relationship between Edith and Fern.

### **Chapter 13 - Discussion Questions**

1. What words and images does the author employ to describe her birth experience? How would you categorize the experience? (158-160)
2. What emotions do you think the author experienced when she learned she has given birth to a girl? (160)
3. Though Edith yearns to share her life with the newborn, she can't even answer Fern's question as to whom the baby resembles. What is the author's response? What is yours? (162)
4. Fern claims her mother is living in "the present." In your opinion, is this a success, a failure, neither or both? (162)
5. In what ways is the birth of a daughter a symbolic opportunity for both Edith and Fern? (162)

### **Chapter 13 – Activities**

1. Interview your mother (if possible) or another close relative or friend to learn about your birth experience. Compare or contrast it with the author's birth experience.

2. Is it ever possible for a family to "start over," to attempt to undo past damage and erosion? Create an artistic or written response to this question.

## Chapter 14 (163-179)

This concluding chapter provides a transition between 1990 and the present. Two years after her return from Germany, Edith receives a mournful letter from Mina's son, Jurgen, who informs her of Mina's death. Jurgen's sensitive writing reveals his own pain of loss and reconfirms the depth of Mina's devotion to Edith, her Tiddy. In 1995, Fern's entire family accompanies Edith and her to meet Jurgen and further explore the expanse of memory. The author renews her earlier stated yearning to discover narrative detail about her heritage, her past. Fern discovers the origins of her family's name and seeks a means to memorialize her grandfather. Though Edith learns that her mother does have a grave site in a nearby city, she is unable to bring herself to visit it. Fern perceives Jurgen as a "brother in history," and he confides that he still "lives with the war" as much as the author does. Jurgen assesses World War II's lingering impact on his country as contemporary Germans wrestle with "collective guilt," muted shame at national identity and issues of moral accountability over the Holocaust. Both Jurgen and Fern reflect on their respective lives spent with "lost" mothers. He informs Fern that Mina never made peace with the past; she died "alone, still at war with everyone around her." Her conscience engendered loneliness and conflict, not comfort. She nursed a lifelong outrage over the fact that many of the perpetrators of the Holocaust went unpunished, unrepentant over their heinous acts. As Jurgen and Fern analyze their respective mothers' post-war attitudes, they come to understand that they, too, have "lived in the shadows of the war." The two realize their involvement with legacy, accepting the burdens of legacy, but also the possibilities, perhaps best articulated by Hans, who hopes that his grandchildren will bear the names of Joshua or Sara, given out of respect for Jewish victims of the Holocaust. And there is the example of Edith, who still mourns the loss of her family, but is affectionately called "Oma" (grandmother in German) by Fern's children.

## Chapter 14 - Discussion Questions

1. What does Jurgen's letter to Edith reveal about his mother's last days? about her relationship with Edith? (pp. 163-165)
2. Jurgen did not arrive in time to say goodbye to his mother before her death. What impact did that have on him? (164)
3. Through the author's eyes, what first impressions do we receive of Jurgen? (165-166)
4. In what ways will the 1995 visit to Germany be different than the 1990 visit? In what ways will it be the same?
5. The author uses specific details to demonstrate how Jurgen has transformed Mina's home. What are your favorite details of the house? (166-167)
6. What are Fern's hopes for her time with Jurgen? What metaphor, introduced in the Prologue, does she use? (167) (see page x i), do
7. What does Fern discover about the origin and significance of her mother's family name? (167)
8. Fern's need to "memorialize" her grandfather would occur at an interesting location. Where and why do you think she would memorialize him at that spot? (168)
9. Describe Edith's reaction to learning that her mother has a grave site. (168-169)
10. As Jurgen escorts Fern and Edith around Stockstadt, he provides examples of how the town has not escaped its past. Which example had the biggest impact on you? (169-170)

11. Jurgen provides his analysis of the Nazis' popularity. In what ways do you find his argument convincing? (170-171)
12. What medium did Hitler use to "market" himself? Is it still a powerful medium today? (171)
13. Explain the German term "Heimat" and provide a reason it is not in use today. (171)
14. Why does Fern ask if Jurgen feels homeless? (171)
15. The author admits she "still lives with the war." How, in 1995, some fifty years after the end of WWII, is this possible? (171)
16. Jurgen analyzes the impact of the war on contemporary Germans. Discuss and assess his ideas. (171)
17. What is "collective guilt" and how does that term relate to ideas of moral responsibility and loss of pride? (171)
18. The author, in her acknowledgments, thanks her brother but never mentions him in her memoir. Yet she calls Jurgen a "brother in history." What does that extraordinary phrase mean? How and why does she feel such a connection with Jurgen? (172)
19. Fern's life has been one of living with a "lost" mother. Jurgen admits that he, too, lost his mother. To whom or what did he lose Mina? (172)
20. For what reason did Mina feel she was a failure? Was she, in your opinion, a failure? (172) 21. Obsessed by the past and encyclopedic in memory, Mina did not like discussions about the Nazis. Why? (172-173)

21. Mina had to deal with lack of punishment of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and a willed collective amnesia of the townspeople specifically and Germany in general. What did this do to her? (173-174)
22. Mina's conscience caused not comfort, but conflict and loneliness. Provide examples of this. (173-174)
23. Why was Mina "alone, still at war with everyone around her"? (173-174)
24. The author throughout her memoir deftly uses metaphor and idiomatic expressions to explain complex ideas. What does Jurgen mean when he says, "The war took [Mina's] breath away"? (174)
25. Fern and Jurgen compare and contrast their respective mothers' personalities and post-war attitudes. What do they have? (174-175)
26. What is the core reason for both mothers' altruism? Do you respect them more or less given this understanding?
27. The author asserts that both Jurgen and she "lived in the shadows of the war." Describe how the sentence which follows the metaphor amplifies the metaphor. (175)
 

29. In what way...
28. To Jurgen, his mother articulated an essential truth about German responsibility in World War II. What is Mina's truth? Do you agree with it? (175-176)
29. To what degree is Jurgen accurate in claiming "nobody walks away from the war"? (176)

30. What impact do Isabelle's eyes have on Jurgen? (177)
31. At the reunion, Hans confesses his desire for grandchildren. What significance attaches to his unborn descendants? (178)
32. Explain the significance of the concluding sentence: "The children call her 'Oma.'" (179)

### Chapter 14 – Activities

1. Are there any old letters your family has chosen to save? What is the content of those letters. Select any one letter your family would consent to your sharing; bring it to class and describe its contents and emotional significance
2. How much of a letter writer are you? Is electronic mail similar to or different than regular mail? What does it feel like to post a letter? to receive one?
3. Write a letter to a person you've been meaning to contact but have postponed doing so.
4. What is the best way to break bad or serious news to a person?
5. People often use non-family members to help them reconstruct the past. Describe a time your family used a non-family member to provide necessary detail about the family's past
6. Jurgen reveals that Germans "named" their Jews after the places from where they came. Research German Jewish attitudes and practices. Has Germany been consistently anti-Jewish throughout its history? How does Germany compare/contrast with the United States' attitude

- and policies towards Jews?
7. What symbolic ways do we, today, have to demonstrate our displeasure towards others?
  8. Try and locate information, photographs and recollections about the 1936 Berlin Olympics (use of the internet is valuable here). In a work of art or writing, describe the impact of the event on different population groups.
  9. "Hitler." The name itself conjures its own reaction. Create a project which examines your reaction to that name.
  10. Create a project which examines the influence of media on American politics today. Do politicians mirror themselves? In what ways?
  11. Is there an American term equivalent to "Heimat"?
  12. In a reflective essay, respond to the following question: Are there parts of our national past for which we feel a sense of collective guilt?
  13. Is it possible for a nation to atone for its past wrongs? Write a poem, song or essay to articulate your feelings.
  14. If you could create an imaginary kinship with anyone in history, whom would you choose and why?
  15. Research the manner in which the Allies (United States) treated the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Which words best describe what occurred to the perpetrators?
  16. Create a chart or mental map depicting how you feel perpetrators of genocide ought be treated.

17. Write an editorial on the thematic question: What is worse, the commission of genocide or the world's unforget the event in later years?
18. Why do people fear men and women of conscience?
19. Undertake a study of the "minor" prophets of the Bible (like Amos). Discern the essential message and explain their relative unpopularity in their own times.
20. Do you know of anyone who has been unable to "get over" past trauma? What type of life do these people have any responsibility towards them?
21. Create an artistic expression of the author's metaphor of living in the "shadows of the war."
22. Create a dialogue between two people who are trying to explore the issue of whether people can "walk away" from war or mass murder.
23. Draw Edith's eyes. Then draw Fern's daughter Isabelle's eyes.
24. Using techniques of calligraphy, abstract art and symbolism, create a project around the names Joshua and/or Sarah.
25. What do you call your grandmother and/or grandfather? What would you like to be called if your should be called? Create a "class composite" of the various terms of endearment or titles your peers have for their grandparents.

## **Epilogue (181-187)**

Not only does this epilogue summarize some of the crucial themes of the memoir, it advances empathy and possibility as well. Edith's return to Germany not only afforded her the opportunity to face her past, it allowed her daughter her first true access to a genuine "family chronicle," a "real history." Fern reprints Edith's final correspondence to Mina, and shortly thereafter, written communication between the two wanes. Skillfully deploying Virginia Woolf's hypothesis that events experienced with "great intensity" have an independent, eternal existence in our minds, Fern underscores her belief that Holocaust victims and escapees were "shaped, defined, and irreparably damaged by it." The Holocaust experience reverberates, resonates generationally. Thus, to Fern, her mother's return to her motherland is a heroic act, signaling to both Edith and Fern alike that its enduring corrosive impact must end. With the hopes of establishing a true mother-daughter relationship, both women are participants in acts of personal renewal – Edith in becoming a mother and Fern in gathering the stones of memory, heritage and history from her narrative stream. The beacon of light is Isabelle, who luxuriates in her grandmother's love and in whom Fern can mold an identity free of the pain of Holocaust despair.

### **Epilogue - Discussion Questions**

1. Pre-read Question: What is the purpose of an epilogue? What information and insights do you hope the author will provide?
2. Post-read Question: In what ways does the author use the epilogue as a means of summarizing the most important themes of the memoir? Summarize what you have learned from *Motherland* in a one-page essay.
3. What city did Edith Westerfeld list as her hometown? (p. 181)

- )
4. The author contrasts her window to the past with other families. Describe the difference and "family chronicle." (181-182) significance of
  5. The author claims she now has a "real history." What does she mean by this phrase? (182)
  6. Describe and analyze some of the contents of Mina's papers. (182)
  7. What occurred to the correspondence between Mina and Edith? How do you account for what happened? (182)
  8. What is the content and tone of Edith's final letter to Mina? (183)
  9. We learn that the author's first and middle names are transmutations of original names. Which name(s) do you prefer? (183)
  10. Reread Virginia Woolf's thoughts on experiencing events with "great intensity." How does the author apply it own life's experiences? (184)
  11. In the second paragraph on page 184, the author skillfully summarizes her understanding of the Holocaust War II on two generations. What is her essential conclusion? (184)
  12. Fern states that people who lived through the Holocaust and World War II were "shaped ... defined ... and irreparably damaged by it." What do each of her three terms mean? Which of the three, in your (184)

13. What is "legacy"? How can a war or genocide be a "legacy"? (184)
14. In Fern's family, how many generations were "devastated" by the Holocaust? How was each ruined? (184)
15. When the author emphatically states, "It ends here," what is she saying? Who will be the greatest beneficiary of "it" stopping? (184 )
16. To the author, who is the hero of her memoir? How is her heroic vision similar or different than yours? (184)
17. The author employs a metaphor to describe the damaging effects of wounds. Describe her imagery and detail the impact of loss on Edith's life. (185)
18. Fern quotes M. R. Montgomery on the impact of parental presence in a child's life. Paraphrase Montgomery's conclusion and discuss its validity. (185)
19. Fern suggests Edith's life was shaped, "not be the normal human experiences of family and work, but by loss." How did her return to Stockstadt address loss? In what ways did the author worry about the continuous impact of loss on her mother's life? (185)
20. The author crafts a memorable definition of *Motherland* on page 186. What and where is this Motherland? Does this idea apply in any way to your own life? (186)
21. Returning elegantly to her initial, overarching metaphor, the author recovers "a few stones from the stream than runs behind" her. What are these stones; what is the stream and how does the memoir integrate both images? (186)

22. How did pain influence both Edith and Fern during the author's childhood? (186)
23. When Isabelle gushed, "Oma, this is the life," an emotional iceberg cracked in both Edith and Fern. What does this reveal about both women? (186)
24. The author shares one final epiphany which occurs as she tries to decipher a tape recording. What is her final, newfound awareness? (187)
25. *Motherland* concludes with a song. What is the basic message of its lyrics? (187) *Motherland* an optimistic or pessimistic memoir? On what do you base your conclusions?

### **Epilogue – Activities**

1. All people have some sort of history. In a short essay, try to describe what your "real history" is.
2. It is a Jewish custom to name newborns after relatives who recently died. What is your opinion of this practice?
3. Using calligraphy or abstract lettering, create a visual transmutation of Frieda to Fern, of Brondl to Brenda.
4. *Motherland* invites us to explore the Holocaust's impact on other survivors and escapees. With your teacher's guidance, select another first-person account of the Holocaust to read, explore and broaden your understanding of what the author labels "legacy." Present your comparative research to your classmates in either a verbal or written report.
5. Prepare, with your classmates, a "legacy wall," in which your contribution is a project that brings a different person's Holocaust experiences to public view.

6. Create a "Living Legacy Wall" in your school where all members of your school community can publicly proclaim what they hope their legacy will be.
7. Invite a member of your community to address your class or school on the importance of legacy. Your guest ought be a person who advanced humanity by acts of courage, public morality or goodness. 35
8. Create a written or artistic project paying homage to a personal hero of yours.
9. Write an opinion piece for your school or local newspaper on the topic: America and hero worship.
10. Has your family ever suffered through a "catastrophic time"? What occurred? Do you agree with the author that "repercussions continue to injure" subsequent generations?
11. In a written or artistic project, treat the theme of parental presence in a child's life.
12. Organize a class debate on the topical question: How involved ought a parent be in a child's life?
13. From your own or derivative experiences, create a poem, song or visual representation of "loss."
14. Using the author's definition of "Motherland," in writing, song, art or dance, craft your own impressions of
15. Create a class-sized "Narrative Stream" in which each member crafts a "stone" or "rock" (either an stone/rock or a two-dimensional representation) on which is written an important memory or "personal secret" that the

creator believes must endure. Encourage other friends and teachers to contribute to this stream.

16. Fern asks her mother if the latter could "stand to read" the memoir once written. Imagine yourself to be Edith and write your daughter an answer to her question.
17. Suppose Edith had begged Fern not to write the memoir but to seek some other means to come to grips with the impact of being an escapee on her mother's life. Should the author have written the memoir anyway? Present your findings in a short essay or letter to the author.
18. Listen to James Taylor and Carly Simon's rendition of "Mockingbird." What is the emotional tone of the song? What is your judgment of the author's decision to use those lyrics as the final words of her memoir?

## Ongoing Activities

### 1. JOURNAL

Citing pages where appropriate, the reader records PERSONAL RESPONSES to *Motherland*, selecting words, sentences or longer passages which evoke a response. The reader writes as many QUESTIONS as he/she can develop as the memoir is read. The reader creates a READING LOG. Every 5, 10 or 15 pages, the reader copies a passage from the memoir in one column of a two-columned journal. The other column is designed for the reader to respond personally to the selected passage.

2. IMAGERY CHAPBOOK-The reader lists as many images which involve the senses. Include use of metaphors, animals, colors, smells, sounds, touch and taste.

3. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE LIST-Create a list of physical objects the author has received or uses through which she keeps memory alive.

4. ANIMAL LIFE-Throughout *Motherland*, the author uses various animal life forms to illustrate ideas or to serve symbolic purposes. Which animal/bird/insect reference had the greatest impact on you? Create an artistic and/or written presentation of animal life imagery and symbolism.

5. LITERARY CONVENTIONS-To what extent does the author use alliteration, metaphor, exposition and dialogue to advance her purposes in *Motherland*?

6. THE THEME OF REPLACEMENT-One of the central themes of *Motherland* is the idea of replacement. Create a project which focuses on the meaning, significance and precise use of the word. Make sure your project discusses how the impact of being a replacement influenced the author. As well, investigate the

influence of being replacements had on other "2G" children of Holocaust survivors.

7. BURDENS ON CHILDREN-*Motherland* is permeated with the painful experience of placing premature or excessively weighty burdens and responsibilities on children. Present examples from the memoir which treat this issue and use your research to create a project which treats this serious issue.

8. ROLE REVERSALS-Fern and Edith's relationship resulted in a convoluted role reversal – where the child becomes the parent and the parent's needs force the child to become a premature caretaker. Analyze this paradox from evidence in the memoir and create a project treating this issue.

9. SELF-PRESERVATION- How strong is the urge for self-preservation? What occurs to individuals struggling to preserve themselves? What occurred to Edith, Fern, Hans and Mina as a result of the urge for self-preservation?

10. FAMILY ROLES- What are the appropriate roles for parents and children in a family? What occurs to these role expectations once the family is exposed to severe strain?

11. "DIRTY SECRETS" - Families often have their "dirty secrets." In Fern's case, her secret may have been resentment at not having a fully-functioning mother. Often, these secrets engender shame, guilt and recrimination. How do "dirty secrets" pervade *Motherland*? To what extent do they influence your own life?

12. SAYING FAREWELL- Saying goodbye or farewell is a central theme of *Motherland*. What insights have you gained as a result of your reading about farewells – temporary and permanent.

13. LEGACY- *Motherland* deals sensitively with the theme of legacy from different perspectives. Use Fern, Mina, Edith, Hans, Jurgen and the town of Stockstadt to explore this theme.

14. METAPHOR - The author is a skilled practitioner of metaphor and use of idiomatic expression to illuminate complicated ideas. Select several metaphors, allusions or idiomatic expressions to amplify in a written or artistic project.

## **Additional Resources:**

**Prologue:** For background on the child escapees who emigrated to the United States, visit "One Thousand Children" ([www.onethousandchildren.org](http://www.onethousandchildren.org)). A powerful visual treatment of the Kinder transport is the award-winning documentary, "Into the Arms of Strangers." To learn more of the United States treatment of Jewish immigration prior to and during World War II, consult David Wyman's definitive studies, "The Abandonment of the Jews" and "Paper Walls."

**Chapter 3:** Your local police department and/or high school counseling service may possess information or curricula on gang formation and how gangs or extra-legal entities may assist people in identity formation. Local hospitals and mental health organizations are excellent resources in studying identity fragmentation and restoration; mental health professionals make compelling presentations to students on how catastrophic events alter victims' personalities.

**Chapter 4:** Students may be ignorant of "Kristallnacht;" the event has received extensive historical investigation and fictional treatments. To assist student awareness of how World War II has remained a source of contemporary controversy, refer to President Ronald Reagan's visit to Bitburg cemetery and Nobel Prize winning survivor Elie Wiesel's response. Students may also benefit from a discussion of survivor guilt, ably treated by author Robert Jay Lifton.

**Chapter 5:** In order to help students understand the author's allusion to Edvard Munch's figures, have examples of his art, especially "The Scream," available.

**Chapter 7:** A local Jewish temple can provide resources to explain the origins, historical significance and meaning of Jewish holidays.

Invite a rabbi to discuss Judaic philosophy on burial and mourning customs. Obtain a recording of the mourner's Kaddish so that students may hear and absorb the mournful cadence of this elegant prayer. Display the Hebrew alphabet in order to demonstrate how the uninitiated could easily place letters upside down. Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur's seminal essay, "What is an American?," is the source of our national debate on assimilation and cultural pluralism. Teachers may use excerpts of this essay to facilitate understanding and debate on the melting pot hypothesis.

**Chapter 12:** "The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg" is a compelling, delightful documentary on not only the Jewish slugger's baseball career, but his impact on Jewish-American identity and the place of baseball in assimilating immigrants into the American mainstream.

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