

ALYSON RICHMAN

THE LOST WIFE - DISCUSSION GUIDE

At its core, *The Lost Wife* is the love story between Lenka and Josef. Discuss the deep feelings that run between the two. How do you think that the love they shared managed to survive the long years of separation? Do you think you'd recognize a loved one after being apart for so long? In what ways do you think the love they shared helped them to survive the atrocities of the war?

Art and color maintain a great significance throughout the course of the novel—the green of Josef's eyes, the red of the strawberries growing near his family's country house, and then later, the drab browns and grays of the Terezin and Auschwitz. Discuss how the author's description of color affected your perception of the novel.

Love is a theme throughout the course of *The Lost Wife*—not just the love between Lenka and Josef, but also the love between the families, the love shared between Lenka's mother and Lucie, and even the love that develops between those kept at Terezin. Discuss the significance of that feeling as it is laid out in the book.

In the author's note, Richman reveals that several of the characters that appear in the book actually existed. Did this change your perception of the novel after you read it?

Despite being overseas in America, Josef can never seem to let go of the memory of his wife. In what ways did his memories of Lenka serve as his own personal jail? What did you think of the relationship between Amalia and Josef? Considering they each were haunted by the death of their families, was it a relationship that worked for them or was it a relationship purely of sorrow? How does it contrast with Lenka and Carl's marriage?

Dina is one of the characters that we later learn was based on an actual person. Discuss her significance in Lenka's life, from when she first meets her on the streets of Prague, to when they reconnect at Auschwitz. How does Dina's spirit help Lenka get through the trials of Auschwitz?

Discuss the underground painters' movement at Terezin. Why do you think the men were so unwilling to allow Lenka to help at first? Was it merely because she was a woman, or do you think they had other reasons for wanting to protect her? In what ways did her taking part in the movement help shape the course of the rest of the novel?

In their own small way, Lenka and her mother attempted to maintain a sense of normalcy for the children at Terezin with their art classes and pilfered paints. What other instances of 'normal' life did you see at Terezin, and later Auschwitz? In what ways do you think that these efforts to maintain happiness even during hardship inform the power of the human spirit? How did you react to the children's creation of the opera *Brundibar*? Like *Brundibar*, Schacter's *Requiem* is also an act of defiance against the Nazis. Do you think such an act was worth the punishment of death?

What did you think of Lenka's deep need to keep her family together despite all odds? In what ways do you think the course of her and Marta's lives may have been altered had they opted to remain at Terezin, instead of following their parents to Auschwitz?

A lot of the history of the plight of Jews during World War II in Europe, and particularly the role of artists during the war, played a role throughout *The Lost Wife*. How did the research affect your reading of the novel? Did you learn new things about World War II and what happened to Jewish families? Were you inspired, after learning that some of the characters were real, to do any additional reading of your own?