

# ALYSON RICHMAN

## THE RHYTHM OF MEMORY - DISCUSSION GUIDE

How would you describe the contrast in palettes that the author used to create the South American landscape to the Scandinavian one? Could you feel the difference in color, scenery, and even culture, between those two places? Discuss the contrast of warm versus cold within the two landscapes and how the author uses color and landscape as metaphor.

Do you think Kaija's parents made the right choice in sending her away to Finland as a war child? Would you have done the same if it were a matter of survival? If you had acted as an adoptive parent to a war child, do you think you could return the child after the war was over?

How does war touch each life in this book? What major decisions might not otherwise have been made if not put under the strain of such sacrifice? What personal relationships are tested?

Could you forgive Astrid for destroying Sirka's letters to her daughter? Could you see the raw emotions behind her actions?

How do you feel about the author's use of historical figures like Neruda and Allende playing direct roles in the actions of the book? Did you think this was successful?

Could you sympathize with Octavio's passion for Allende's politics and legacy, even as it puts his family at grave risk? Can you fault him for standing up for what he believes in? Why doesn't he change his ways after the first abduction?

How difficult were the torture scenes for you to read? Do you think they were too intense, or do you think the detailed descriptions were necessary to convey the horrors of what went on there?

How does Salomé attempt to save her life in prison? What memories does she re-create for the guard to make her case? Do you think Octavio would have approved? Would you act in the same way if your life was at stake?

Why do both Octavio and Salomé refuse to speak to each other about the second abduction— and the lengths they each went in securing Salomé's freedom and the torture she was subjected to? Do you think it would have saved their marriage? Why or why not?

Discuss the power of music in this story— as both an agent of pain and pleasure.

How do secrets destroy the relationships in the book— from Octavio and Salomé's, to Kaija and Samuel's?

Did your feelings for Octavio's character change over the course of the novel? Did he redeem himself with his attempts at rescuing Salomé? Do you think he had really changed?

How does Salomé need the affair with Samuel to feel whole? Is it a lasting feeling? Do you believe that her therapy (or encounters) healed her? Do you think Samuel crossed a line in continuing to treat Salomé as a patient as his feelings grew?