

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR ELEANOR COURTTOWN

This book is loosely based on the true story of a poisoning that happened in the 1870s on a farm not far from ours. I tried to find a record of the events but was unable to turn up anything concrete in local archives. I thought that the story would be interesting for people to hear but might also contribute to an understanding of the history of Ontario.

1. Eleanor is a headstrong young woman raised in privilege. She evolves a great deal as the story unfolds. How does her character development impact upon your feelings for her?
2. Dr. Stewart continues to shock Eleanor with his lack of conventionality. While she trusts him to be a gentleman he does not always behave in ways that she understands to be appropriate for his station. How does this behaviour contribute to (or impede) their relationship? Does his conduct have any impact upon how you respond to him?
3. Eleanor has to make several major accommodations to her understanding of appropriate social behaviour and customs. Can you identify some of these and explain how they contribute to the flow of the novel?
4. If you had to describe the theme of the novel to someone who has not read it, what would you select as a key theme?
5. The novel intends, to a certain degree, to emulate a *Novel of Manners*. A *Novel of Manners* draws the reader's attention to the conversations, social customs, and ideology of a certain class or member group in society. How well do you think this book has captured the essence of these things? Does it remind you of a book you may have read that was also a *Novel of Manners*?
6. Lily's *marriage* to Jack came as a shock to Eleanor. Did you have difficulty understanding the position she was in once Rowland died? Was there anything about her relationship with Jack that you found surprising or uncomfortable?
7. Jack Carey's treatment at the hands of Dr. Stewart and others in the Village may strike some as unusual. Did you have thoughts about how he might have been handled differently?
8. Rather than return to Ireland, Eleanor chose to stay in Orange Hill and enter into a loveless marriage with Dr. Stewart. Did this surprise or disappoint you? Did it seem to you to be a believable decision?
9. Eleanor plans to take her daughter to Ireland and plans, potentially, to leave her there on her own. Does this decision make sense to you?
10. There are a number of characters in the book that represent the many aspects of village life in that time and place. Who would you identify as being particularly significant to your understanding and enjoyment of the book?
11. A great deal of research forms the underpinning of this novel. Can you identify the ways in which the history has contributed to the novel?
12. Can you choose a character that spoke to you or stayed with you after you closed the book? Who was it and why did they linger?