

A black and white photograph of a snowy forest path lined with evergreen trees. The path is covered in snow and has tracks from a sled or skis. The trees are heavily laden with snow, and the sky is overcast.

T H E
D I V I D E
JOLINA PETERSHEIM
a novel

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In both *The Alliance* and *The Divide*, Leora struggles with her pacifist ideals in light of her current reality. Did you find her struggle realistic? Were you surprised at where she ended up on this issue, or was it what you anticipated?
2. When faced with the likelihood of being killed, Leora shoots—and kills—a man in self-defense. Did this surprise you? Was there another option you would have liked or expected Leora to pursue? How do you think you would respond in a similar situation?
3. During the funeral service in chapter 7, Bishop Lowell quotes John 1:5, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.” In what ways do we see light shining in the darkness throughout this story? In what ways have you seen light shine in the darkness during your own life?

THE DIVIDE

4. As Moses reflects on his grandfather's life and death, he realizes, "Yes, if I pursue Leora, she will no doubt experience more pain than if she were alone, or with Jabil. But the joy of companionship—of daily love—far exceeds the pain." When have you been tempted to withdraw from others to protect yourself from pain? In what ways have you found Moses's conclusions to be true?
5. At one point Leora laments that living in crisis has robbed her of a "normal" life and expresses her hope that one day life will return to some semblance of normalcy: "I want to get so wrapped up in 'normal' that I forget what a gift normal really is." Has there been a time in your life—illness, the death of a loved one, a job loss—when you wondered if life would ever be normal again? How do such experiences change us?
6. Leora wrestles with the age-old problem of pain: If God can see everything that's wrong in the world, why doesn't he change it? Do you agree with Moses's answer, that it's because God gave us free will—that people have the ability to choose right or wrong, love or hate? If this is something you have thought about, what conclusions have you reached?
7. Josh is a minor character who fills an important role in Moses's life. How would you describe the

friendship between these two men? Do you have a mentor in your life like Josh was to Moses, or do you fill that role for someone else? In what ways can this be an important relationship, in both directions?

8. What were your reactions to Jabil's character? Do you think Leora should have married him? Why or why not? Was Jabil's fate realistic? Appropriate? Do you see it as a positive or negative thing?
9. Are there aspects of your family's or church's teachings that you have reexamined as an adult? How significant are the differences between what you believe now and what you were taught as a child? How will you feel if your children grow up to reject some of what you are teaching them?
10. Is there a place for pacifism in today's world? Do you personally know anyone who takes this stance? What are its pros and cons?