

A
TRAIL
of
CRUMBS

A Novel of the Great Depression

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the story, Pearl and Ray discuss leaving Red River. Have you ever been in a situation where leaving a place/job/church was the logical decision, but emotionally it seemed impossible? How did you work out that tension?
2. What did you think of Ray's mother's request that Daddy take her son with them? Was this a selfish or selfless act? What might have been her motivation? Should Daddy have agreed to take Ray? Did your perspective on this change as the story unfolded?
3. Many families from the Dust Bowl region relocated to California where there was the promise of work and good pay. The Spence family goes north to be with a cousin Daddy hadn't seen in over a decade. What do you think of their choice? How might the story have been different if they'd gone to California?
4. In an agriculturally healthy place such as Bliss, the people weren't as hard-pressed to find food during the Great Depression. However, they felt the pinch of the financial crisis in other ways. How might they have experienced the Depression differently than those living in the Dust Bowl region? From those living in a major city?
5. It was common for local newspapers to publish the names of those who took assistance from the government during the Great Depression. Why do you think this was a common practice? What purpose could it have served? What was your reaction to that part of the story?

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6. From Pearl's perspective, Mama's behavior in Michigan is out of character. What are some changes Pearl sees? What caused these changes? Is Mama being internally or externally motivated, especially in her interactions with Abe Campbell? Have you seen this kind of transformation in someone you know? What was it like?
7. For Pearl, stories are a way to process her life as well as escape from it. What role do stories play in your life? What childhood book was your favorite or made the strongest impression on you?
8. To help the nation recover from the Depression, President Roosevelt established many government programs in the New Deal. One was the Works Progress Administration, which hired people to build national infrastructure, document the era through newspapers and photography, and teach in rural communities that could not afford a teacher (like Miss De Weese). Some chaffed at this program while others praised it. What do you think of such government programs? Could people have survived the Depression without those jobs or food assistance? What might the reaction to such programs be today?
9. What types of prejudice are evident in this novel? How does Pearl largely manage to observe them and not participate in them? What has shaped her view of others who are different from herself?
10. Near the end, Pearl feels the tension between anger and sadness and the desire to forgive Mama. This is a complex emotional state and can be confusing for adults, let alone children. Have you felt this type of emotional tension before? Were you able to resolve it? How?
11. Pearl's story continues in *A Song of Home: A Novel of the Swing Era*. What do you think will happen to her in the completion of her story? What would you like to see happen? If you could wish one thing for her life, what would it be?