

Discussion Questions for *Winterkill*

Look at the book cover. Consider the title. What do you think this book is about? Define the word “winterkill”.

Chapter One

As the book opens, what do Nyl and his father see when they get back to the village? How would you feel if this happened in your hometown?

Why does Yulia react so differently to Nyl towards Alice? What do you think of Alice and her father?

Chapter Two

Slavko and Nyl have completely different reactions to the events in this chapter. Why? If this happened in your hometown, how would you react?

Chapter Three

Do you think Alice and her father knew what would happen to Uncle Illya? Can you think of anything that the family could have done to get a different outcome? What would you have done if this happened in your family?

Chapter Four

Why is this chapter titled Travel to the Moon?

Chapter Five

How do you feel about the actions in this chapter? Why were the animals treated so poorly?

Chapter Six

What are some of the problems that are still happening at the kolkhoz?

Chapter Seven

What is the family arguing about? Whom do you agree with?

Chapter Eight

Why did Chort take the wheat? Do you think Tupolev is trustworthy? Why?

Chapter Nine

Why did Comrade White and Alice come back to Nyl’s house? Who else do you think they visited?

Chapter Ten

The old woman has Soviet propaganda in her house. What is the propaganda and why does she have to have it in her house?

What is a kulak?

Why are “kulaks” not supposed to be hired?

Chapter Eleven

Was it a good decision for Nyl and Slavko to come to the tractor construction site? Why, why not?

Will the tractor factory help the farmers?

Chapter Twelve

Why did Yulia do what she did? What do you think about her choices?

Chapter Thirteen

What are some good things that happened in this chapter? Compare Nyl’s character to Slavko’s, and to Yulia’s. Who is most like you? Why?

Chapter Fourteen

What do the ravens symbolize in this chapter?

Chapter Fifteen

Why is Mama arrested? Why did the soldier destroy the pich?

Chapter Sixteen

Two years have passed since the first chapter. List out the things that have changed in that time.

Why do you think the book (and this chapter) is called Winterkill?

Chapter Seventeen

Find an image of the Soviet flag. Consider the propaganda billboard titled “We smite lazy workers”. What is the intended symbolism of the hammer and sickle on the flag? How does it change on the billboard? How does it change in real life at this time?

Chapter Eighteen

Why do the boys call the factory Tractorzloy now?

Chapter Nineteen

Do you think Nyl is happy to see Alice? Do you think Alice is happy to see Nyl? Why? Why not?

Chapter Twenty

How have Alice and her father changed? How do you think they feel about their earlier actions? Are they doing enough to make amends? What else could they do?

Chapter Twenty-One

Is their plan a good one? What are they forgetting to consider?

Chapter Twenty-Two

Did Slavko make a wise decision? What do you think of Alice's plan?

Chapter Twenty-Three

Why are only some people starving? How does Alice help Nyl?

Chapter Twenty-Four

What is day to day life like for communist workers in Kharkiv? Brainstorm a typical day, including where they live, what they eat, where they shop and work. Now do the same for an escaped farmer.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Why much Alice and Nyl hide at night?

Chapter Twenty-Six

How has Roman changed since the beginning of Winterkill? Would his parents approve of his activities? Why?

Chapter Twenty-Seven

This chapter showcases an elaborate propaganda ploy. Do you think it would be effective in convincing the tourists? Consider other propaganda techniques you've encountered throughout the book. Which surprised you the most and why.

What propaganda have you seen in your own country? Give an example of effective propaganda that you have encountered in your own life.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

How does Rhea change Alice's and Nyl's fate? Does she do enough? Why/why not?

Chapter Twenty-Nine

What challenges to Nyl and Alice face in this chapter? What would be the hardest part if you were in their place?

Chapter Thirty

What surprises you about this chapter?

Chapter Thirty-One

Why did they choose ravens and flowers as their secret language?

This book was written before Russia's current war on Ukraine, but there are similarities in the past to what's happening now. With that in mind, carefully read the final paragraph on page 266. What are your thoughts on how it applies to the current situation in Ukraine?