

## *The Mason House* Reading Guide

1. *The Mason House* opens with a funeral scene. What tone did that scene set for the rest of the story? Did this tone fit the overall story?
2. In the opening chapter, Theresa recalls her mother's words before the funeral: *You have to be strong. No crying. You have to be a big girl.* (p. 8) Where did you find a similar behest later in the book which may have influenced this particular scene? Did this scene bear impact on your view of Theresa's mother? If so, in what way? Did your view change as the story progressed?
3. Theresa's Ojibwe mother and her Cornish grandma shared much in common. Many of these commonalities involved loss. Discuss these similarities. How did the women cope with loss?
4. What emotions were evoked by reading the scenes in Grandma's Mason home? Which scene or scenes did you *feel* the most while reading? Why do you think that particular scene or scenes brought about such reaction in you?
5. Discuss Grandma's Mason home and the role it fulfilled in Theresa's life. For Theresa, would you say the Mason house is inextricably linked with Grandma or do they play separate roles?
6. As a child, Theresa existed in a diaspora of sorts, identifying as a Native child, but living in a settler community with little exposure to Ojibwe culture. What are some examples of that experience in the writing?
7. Theresa says of her trips with Grandma to Chassell for card playing, that when she rides through the town, she feels "... a swell in my chest. A butterfly feeling." (p. 48) What is it that brings about this reaction in her? Are Theresa's feelings about her Native heritage in keeping with that of her mother or her sisters? Compare and contrast the experiences of the family where Native heritage is concerned.
8. Theresa's mother tells her one night, "Did you know your mother is a Chippewa? A Chippewa *Indian*?" (p. 245) Why do you think her mother singularly identified herself as such? Consider the possible effects of this statement on Theresa.
9. What role do the siblings play in each other's lives as they navigate a dysfunctional homelife?
10. Discuss the symbolism in the set of handmade Barbie clothes Theresa received as a gift from her grandma. Why were they so important to her? What did they represent?

11. While living in West Virginia, Theresa begins to experience powerful dreams of her gramma. In Theresa's point of view, what is the significance of these dreams?
12. As an early teen in southern Texas, Theresa espouses her identity as an American Indian. Consider Theresa's description of the social environment of the region and discuss how this environment affected her.
13. In the "Zeba" chapter, Theresa writes: 'You only kept secrets when you broke rules.' (p. 262) How was Theresa's mother affected by her early pow wow experience? What impact might this experience have had on her mother's connection with her birth culture?
14. When Theresa tells her mother of her experience with the unexplained lights in the trees, her mother tells her: "That's your Indian. Don't be scared o' that." (p. 289) Considering the overall story, what does this say of her mother's journey?
15. Some reviews have noted that *The Mason House* is a book about healing. Do you agree or disagree with this perspective?