

The Mortal Groove Readers' Guide

Starting Points for Discussion

1. In this mystery, Hart explores a theme of violence—how violent experience changes people. Discuss this theme in relation to both Peter Lawless and Randy Turk.
2. Early in the book, Randy talks about his loneliness as a boy and how the desire to connect with other guys his age set him on a path that he might have fled from if he'd understood where it would lead. How was loneliness complicit in Randy's demise?
3. Would you say that Larry Wilton was molded by his time in Vietnam, or do you think he would have been the same kind of man, regardless of his war-time experiences?
4. How do you think what happened to Peter in that travel trailer at the end of the book will change him?
5. Do you believe Peter was right to take Mia, or should he have left her in foster-care and tried another way to bring her home?
6. Was there redemption in this book? For any of the characters?
7. How do you think Peter's decision to take Mia will effect his future with his wife?
8. Jane is appalled by what Peter does to Larry Wilton. Do you think she should forgive him? Forget? Turn Peter into the police? How will this alter their relationship?
9. Peter is a damaged soul, looking for a way to be a hero. Larry Wilton is considered a hero by his friends because he saved their lives many times over. What is a true hero? Do we use that term too easily today?
10. In this story, some cracks begin to appear in Jane's relationship with Kenzie. Do you think they are a good match?
11. Many of the characters in this book are keeping secrets. Can you name some of them? Is not telling something you know the same as a lie?
12. In chapter sixteen Randy sweats his way through a difficult conversation with his daughter, Katie. "Randy was having a hard time looking at her. In a flash, it came to him. He was afraid of her, of her judgement. He felt suddenly old—an old man sensing how impossible it was to reduce the truth of his life to something simple enough to satisfy a child." Have you ever felt that way?

13. Hart touches on race tensions during the Vietnam era. Did her portrayal seem realistic?
14. Hart's books have been called "Cozies with a Brain." Where would you place this novel within the context of mystery fiction? Cozy/traditional? Hard-boiled? Soft-boiled?