

## **THE STONE CARVERS RESPONSE PAPER AND DISCUSSION TOPICS**

### **P. 1 - 100**

1. Consider this quotation from pages 24-25: “But the backwoods was no place for even the middle-aged, as everyone was necessarily engaged in the act of turning one thing into another, a labour that never ceased...the men in the sawmill helped turn forests into wastelands, while the farmers attempted to turn wastelands into fields...All of them were trying to force western culture into a place where it undoubtedly had no business to be. It was hard work.” What comment about our civilization do you think Urquhart is trying to make here? Discuss your views and understanding of imperialism and colonialism.
2. How do you feel about Helga and Dieter’s restraint of Tilman (p. 65)? What else could they have done to deal with this difficult situation? Try to examine the dilemma from both points of view.
3. Consider Klara’s reaction to the overtures of Eamon. Why does she respond with such hostility? What is it about her character and upbringing that have caused her to be so suspicious and guarded?
4. Tilman is a very enigmatic character. Do you find him to be authentic and believable in his isolation? Discuss your responses to his character.
5. Consider this quotation from page 74: “This irreplaceable woodland had been felled with alarming swiftness, had been floated down rivers to sawmills, loaded on lake boats, then shipped down the St. Lawrence River to the Atlantic Ocean...As a result of the Motherland’s insatiable hunger for lumber, sawmills had opened all over Upper Canada, had flourished, had made small fortunes for their owners, and had closed and fallen into ruin in the space of thirty years. All that remained now of the vast army of trees were vestiges in certain pieces of pioneer furniture and the odd oversized floorboard in a country house.” What point do you think Urquhart is trying to make here? What are your reactions to this quotation?

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### **P. 100 – 200**

1. Eamon is determined to join the war effort, despite his own history and the protestations of his loved ones. Why would he do this? Why is the lure of war so irresistible to him? Consider pages 152-3 (among others) in your response.
2. Consider Joseph Becker's perceptions of Klara. It would appear that he views her as lesser or insignificant when compared to her brother Tilman. Discuss this relationship and how it shapes the consciousness of Klara through her struggle for acceptance. Why would Joseph view his granddaughter this way? Consider pages 96, 97, 160 – among others.
3. Tilman, Phoebe, and Refuto are all characters that have chosen a transient, nomadic existence. Why have they chosen this path? How do you feel about the hobo lifestyle?
4. After a lifetime of anticipation and waiting, Father Gstir finally gets his bell only to pass away shortly thereafter (p. 144-8). Discuss the irony of such an incident. What kind of message is Urquhart trying to communicate through Gstir's character and his fate?

### **P. 200-300**

1. Why do you think Tilman is so hesitant to return to France? Why then does he finally relent to Klara's wishes to go to the Vimy Memorial (p. 256-8)?
2. Why is Klara so intent on journeying to Vimy? Why doesn't she simply go somewhere else more practical? What is it about the Memorial in France that irresistibly draws her?
3. Comment on your impressions of "limb-bo". What message is Urquhart communicating regarding the treatment of veterans in this country? What should have been done for these individuals? Why is disfigurement so difficult for our society to deal with (p. 234)?
4. What are your impressions of Walter Allward? How would you like to be employed by him? Why does he insist on repressing the creativity of his carvers? How is his treatment of them ironic (p. 288)?
5. Discuss Tilman's transformation upon discovering the pleasures of fine cuisine (p. 297). Why would this affect him so dramatically? Consider the similarities between cooking and art.
6. Consider the description of the Vimy Ridge battleground from page 268. What are your impressions from this description?

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### **P. 300 – 390**

1. Discuss and compare Klara's relationship with Eamon to that of Giorgio. How are they similar? How are they different? What changes does Klara undergo as time passes? As well, consider Klara's lengthy period as a spinster.
2. Why do you think Klara pushes Giorgio away after he asks her about the boy she was carving (p. 360)? Why is she so defensive? How does the resolution of this "problem" allow Klara to move on? Consider Klara's evolution from girl to woman.
3. Tilman finally embraces his sexuality in this section of the novel (p. 329-30). At last his marginalism and isolation as a character can be alleviated due to his relationship with Recouvrit. Tilman gives away his "Royal Thunderer" whistle in a symbolic act at the end of the book. How does this reveal his evolution as a character? What were your impressions of this character shift in the novel?
4. Discuss the cumulative effects of Klara and Tilman's trip to France. How does this journey transform both characters? What does this tell the reader about the benefits of change and confronting the past?
5. Consider Walter Allward's decline from respected and elite artist to forgotten and troubled stranger. How is his transformation significant? What does this say about Allward as a person? You may wish to compare him to other characters in the novel.
6. "Canadians never developed the concept of women as merely brainless decoration. Canadian oral folklore is still full of tales of our grandmothers' generation, when women ran farms, chased off bears, delivered their own babies in remote locations and bit off the umbilical cords. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains: if you're looking at writing in Canada at all, you can't just footnote the women" (Margaret Atwood from Strange Things). What are your impressions of Klara as a character? Do you think she is believable? Does she fit with the description above? Respond to her in some way.
7. Respond to the novel as a whole. What did you learn from it? What were the strengths? The weaknesses?