

The Mourning Hours by Paula Treick DeBoard
Discussion questions for book clubs

- 1.** At the beginning of the novel, Kirsten's father tells her that everything you needed to know...you could learn on a farm. In what ways does this statement prove true—both in the book and in real life?
- 2.** Explaining death to his daughter, Kirsten's father says, "It's just how things go. It's the way things are." Is this appropriate wisdom to share with a nine-year-old girl? Why does this advice make sense for Kirsten? Kirsten references "the life cycle" throughout the novel. What does she mean by this?
- 3.** How does Kirsten's age affect how you read/understand the book? How is it an advantage to the storytelling? In what ways is it a disadvantage?
- 4.** Consider Johnny and Stacy's relationship from their first meeting on the softball diamond to their last, ill-fated night together. What attracted them to each other? Is Johnny's mother right when she says their relationship is too obsessive, or is this just a normal teenage relationship? How would you react if your child was in a similar kind of relationship?
- 5.** The people of Watankee react to Stacy's disappearance by convicting the Hammarstrom family in different ways. Is it surprising that few people come to Johnny's defense? How do you think the small-town culture contributes to people's responses?
- 6.** Family loyalty is a strong theme in the book. Is Kirsten wrong for feeling conflicted over whether her brother is guilty or innocent? If your child or sibling was accused of committing a violent crime, how do you think you would handle it?
- 7.** After the Memorial Day incident, the Hammarstrom family begins to drift apart and eventually disperses to different parts of the country. Only John stays behind on the farm. Do you feel the dissolution of the family could have been prevented? Why do you suppose they fled, and do you feel it was the right thing to do? What, if anything, would you have done differently?
- 8.** At the end of the novel Kirsten puts "an imaginary ear to the ground, listening for the roots of the corn to spread downward," referring to something her grandfather used to do. What is this a metaphor for?