

## **Discussion Questions**

### *An American Tune*

1. *An American Tune* is set in the run-up to the Iraq War. To what degree do you think the rhetoric and events surrounding this issue affected Nora's state of mind and caused her life to begin to unravel? In what ways do you think the United States' involvement in Iraq parallels its involvement with Vietnam?
2. On her first day at Indiana University, Jane established what would turn out to be two of the most important relationships in her life. How do you think Tom and Bridget affected the course of her life? What relationships affected the course of yours?
3. What do you think about Jane's determination to go away to college, given her family's limited resources? Why do you think she kept the happiness she found there a secret?
4. Compare Jane and Tom's relationship to the relationship between Bridget and Pete. Why do you think Bridget persisted in believing her relationship with Pete would work out and how did her stubbornness about it affect Jane and Tom?
5. Compare Jane and Bridget's reasons for getting involved in the antiwar movement and the depth of their commitment to bringing the war to an end. Why do you think Jane ultimately chose teaching as the way she wanted to try to change the world? Why didn't she cut her ties with Bridget when she realized how far apart their values and beliefs had grown?
6. How do you think the Christmas bombings of Hanoi affected Jane's decision to shelter Bridget when she appeared at their house, unexpectedly, after Tom told her he wanted Bridget to leave? Discuss how this single unwise decision drastically changed the trajectory of her life. Has this ever happened to you or someone you love?
7. Do you think that Tom and Jane would have married and stayed together if she had gone back to him as soon as she could get away from Cam?
8. Do you believe that Nora was happy in the life she made with Charlie? If Claire had chosen a different college, do you think the two of them would have adjusted to her absence and gone on living happily together?
9. What was Jo's role in Nora's life? What was the effect of her decline into Alzheimer's disease on Charlie and Nora, individually, and on their marriage?
10. Do you think Nora was wrong to go back to People's Park, knowing that Tom might be there? Do you think she planned to do it all along?
11. Discuss how Nora and Diane's friendship sustained both of them through difficult times. Do you have a friendship like this in your life? How do you think women's friendships are different from men's?
12. What do you think about Charlie's reaction to Nora's confession? Do you believe, as he did, that some things are better left unspoken? Would it have been better if Nora had kept the secret?

13. Was Diane right when she said, "...the world isn't easy, and the sooner kids figure it out, the better?" How do you think the life Nora and Charlie made for Claire made it more difficult for her to learn about her mother's past? Do you think it is a good thing to try to give your children a perfect childhood?
14. What do you think of Nora's decision to go to Bloomington with Tom? If she had decided against going, do you think they'd have ended up together anyway?
15. Rediscovering lost love is a common fantasy, but having it actually happen to you presents all kinds of problems. Talk about the challenges Nora and Tom faced when they reconnected and their attempts to overcome them.
16. How does Nora's reaction to the President's declaration of war against Iraq finally bring things to a head and make her see what she must do if she is to survive the emotional crisis she's in and have some hope of happiness?
17. Discuss Astro's role in bringing Nora and Claire back together. Why do you think Charlie decided to give him to Nora after that happened?
18. At the end of the book, you know that Tom is still in Nora's life and that her relationship with Claire has begun the healing process. How do you think their lives will play out from there?
19. The title of *An American Tune* comes from a Paul Simon song of the same name, which includes these lines: "I don't know a soul who's not been battered/Don't have a friend who feels at ease/ Don't know a dream that's not been shattered/Or driven to its knees." How are these lyrics reflected in Nora/Jane's story? Do you think this observation holds true for many in the Baby Boom generation? To what degree is it true to your own experience?
20. Rock and Roll was the soundtrack for the world-changing events of the 1960's, as well as for the Baby Boomers' personal lives. How do you think the song title of each chapter reflects its tone and content? What songs come to mind when you think about important moments in your own life?