

Discussion questions for KINGDOM OF THE BLIND

1. Snow is a virtual character in this book, “both beautiful and alarming.” In Chapter 4, we are told, “In the countryside, winter was a gorgeous, glorious, luminous killer.” What other passages about snow are particularly striking, and how does the weather affect the story?
2. There are different kinds of families in the novel, from the Baumgartners to the Gamaches to the bonds between Benedict and Katie (“Benedict wondered if he tried, really, really tried, he could build a relationship that solid”), to the team of Armand, Jean-Guy, and Isabelle: “Her husband stayed behind in the living room, watching the three of them go. Recognizing that while he and the children would always be the most important parts of Isabelle’s lives, these three also formed a family.” There is even the drug dealer who names the new opioid “David” after his father. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these families?
3. In what ways does Louise misdirect the reader about the actions of various characters, including Benedict, Amelia, and the Baumgartner siblings, as well as Beauvoir and his possible “betrayal” of Gamache? How does she obscure Gamache’s own intentions? What were your worst fears for the characters, and how satisfying did you find the resolutions of their stories?
4. A number of the characters in the story are outliers in outward appearance and/or manner, including Benedict, Katie, the notary, Hugo, Billy Williams, Gracie, and arguably Ruth. How do first impressions line up with final ones? What conclusions, if any, can you draw about the importance of looks and behavior?
5. What are the roles of the various women in KINGDOM OF THE BLIND? In what ways do they meet or defy conventional expectations?
6. “You do know that the earth is round,” Gamache says to his godfather at lunch, to which Stephen Horowitz replies, “The earth might be, but human nature isn’t. It has caverns and abysses and all sorts of traps.” What aspects of human nature do we see throughout the novel?
7. When Beauvoir visits Taylor and Ogilvy, he notes that it seems like “a play. A set. Something that looked like one thing but was actually another,” with “fake originals.” What kinds of authenticity are important in this story?
8. The Montréal underworld could not seem more different from the sanctuary of Three Pines, yet Amelia finds herself in “an alley off an alley off a back lane. Impossible to find, except by those who were lost. She was pretty sure it wouldn’t be on any map. But once found, it was never forgotten. And probably never left.” This echoes language that is

customarily used to describe Three Pines. Why do you think Louise describes the two places in such similar ways?

9. "How do you do it?" Isabelle asks Gamache in Chapter 11, as she struggles to recover from being shot in the head. When he responds, "Remember?" she answers, "Forget." What do you make of Gamache's story about the longhouse, where nothing can ever be expelled or hidden away?
10. Gamache also tells Isabelle, "I made mental lists and followed the things I love, the people I love, back to sanity. I still do." How does this compare with the description of Ruth's approach in Chapter 9: "Ruth remembered everything. Every meal, every drink, every sight, every slight, real and imagined and manufactured. Every compliment. Every word spoken and unspoken. She retrained it all, and rendered those memories into feelings and the feelings into poetry"?
11. We are told that "for reasons that baffled Gamache, he seemed the only person on earth who could not understand a word Billy Williams said. Not a word. Not even close." Can you understand Billy? What do you make of what he says and does? How do you feel about what might be happening between him and Myrna, and what the future might hold for them?
12. There are numerous instances in which characters are literally or figuratively blinded – by snow, by the debris from the house, by perspective (for example, consider Annie's comment in Chapter 3, "Dad had no choice. But they might not see it that way," and Beauvoir's reply, "Then they're blind"). How do these relate to the book's title and the original passage from Erasmus?
13. Why does Amelia Choquet call herself "the one-eyed man"? What do you think of this "stoned former prostitute junkie who's dealing opioids in the Academy" at various points in the story?
14. At the end of the novel, Myrna looks "up into the night sky. At all the dots of light shining down on her." How does this connect to "Ruth and a dot of light" in Clara's most famous painting, and what does that dot mean to you?