Mink River, Brian Doyle

Discussion Questions

1. Some have described the writing style in Mink River as: stream of consciousness, like a babbling brook, or a lullaby. What did you think of the style?

2. What are your thoughts on the structure of the story; did you like the alternating chapters, interwoven plot lines?

3. What role does the Oregon Coast play as a setting for the story? Is this setting essential? Why or why not?

4. What do you think of Cedar’s reply to No Horses about habits and people who helped him get through dark times? Based on your own life experiences, is there a piece of advice you’d add to what he says?

5. Which characters in the book show the “certain ferocious attention to things” that Cedar describes? What are some examples, and can you name ways this habit has helped those characters through dark times?

6. Story telling is an important activity for several characters in the book. Do you have stories within your own family that you have passed along? Why does the author seem to think that story telling is important?

7. How do you feel about how death of the various characters is portrayed in Mink River? Consider the characters’ types, how they died and how their experience just after death is described.

8. What did you think of Moses? Did you like the idea of a talking crow? What do you think of magical realism in general?

9. The Department of Public Works handled much more than city maintenance. Do you think there is a place for a department of public works of this nature within your own city?

10. Discuss the community of Neawanka: its strengths and weaknesses.

11. What do you think the source of Nora’s pain—she says it is “no hope”, what does she mean? Is her pain ever resolved?

12. Abuse is featured in the book, how do you think this difficult subject was handled?
13. Each character within the book is either struggling or searching. Choose a character and describe the struggle or search and describe also the resolution, if any.

14. How are music, art, and language important aspects of Mink River’s community?

15. Describe some of the themes presented in the book. Are there any that you relate to?

16. What do you think Worried Man will be able to offer his family and community as a result of his stroke?

17. Discuss the doctor’s life and his role in the community and his study of the Bible.

18. What happened when Sara’s baby first made a sound; what was the sound and what affect did it have on the family?

19. What was your reaction when Declan killed his cows? What did you think of the consequence, i.e. how the community responded?

20. Share any other impressions you have of the book. Did the author’s style remind you of any other authors? Did Mink River remind you of any other books?