

THE LITTLE BRIDE by Anna Solomon

READERS GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

When 16-year-old Minna Losk journeys from Odessa to America as a mail-order bride, she dreams of a young, wealthy husband, a handsome townhouse, and freedom from physical labor and pogroms. But her husband Max turns out to be twice her age, rigidly Orthodox, and living in a one-room sod hut in South Dakota with his two teenage sons. The country is desolate, the work treacherous. Most troubling, Minna finds herself increasingly attracted to her older stepson. As a brutal winter closes in, the family's limits are tested, and Minna, drawing on strengths she barely knows she has, is forced to confront her despair, as well as her desire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Solomon received her MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *One Story*, *The Georgia Review*, and elsewhere, and has twice been awarded a Pushcart Prize. Formerly, she produced and reported award-winning features for National Public Radio's "Living on Earth." She lives in Providence, RI. Author website: annasolomon.com

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What destiny is Minna trying to escape in fleeing Odessa? Do you think she'd have been better served by staying and marrying a man her aunts would have recommended over taking a blind leap of faith?
2. The author infuses *The Little Bride* with sweeping historical details and lush portraits of not only the teeming cities but the vast Western landscape. While reading the novel, did you feel as though you'd been transplanted to the great, vibrant plains of South Dakota? What was life like for these colonists? What challenges awaited them as they pulled away from the bigger cities, especially as the seasons changed?
3. Why do you think the mail-order bride business thrived and appealed to some participants? What reasons did Max have to summon Minna to South Dakota? What was he hoping for in his "little bride"? What role was Minna stepping into?

4. Minna undergoes many hardships during her journey to America. What life is she expecting there? What parts of herself did she want to leave behind?
5. How does working with the earth on Max's farm change Minna? What skills does she possess when she first arrives, and how does she build her self-reliance? How does being in survival mode cause her to mature?
6. How does the absence of Minna's mother echo throughout her life, and over the course of the novel? How is this loss—and the lessons and wisdom Minna would never receive from her—mirrored in Samuel and Jacob's lives, who also have had their mother leave them?
7. Think about the idea of faith. Max is ostensibly the most faithful character, but how is his faith a weakness? Which other characters exhibit faith? How does Minna have faith?
8. What similarities are there between Max and Minna's father? How are both marked by the grief of losing their wife, and how does each choose to live afterward?
9. How would you describe Minna's relationship to Jacob and Samuel? Do you believe Minna when she admits to coming to feel love for her husband and stepsons? What is the turning point for her, and does she later reverse this feeling?
10. How is a woman's worth tied into her fertility—then and even now? In the book, how is this demand heightened on the frontier versus in the more urban, settled cities? Why?
11. The idea of virtue is important throughout the novel. Which characters do you think are virtuous? How do they express their virtue? Is virtue always a good quality?
12. Minna makes a choice for herself at the end of the novel. Do you think this is a sign of maturity? What do you think she has learned from her experience?

