

The Art of Hearing Heartbeats - Discussion Questions

1. What does the back and forth between Julia's and U Ba's narratives add to the love story of Tin Win and Mi Mi? How do these storylines interrelate?
2. Tin Win is abandoned as a child, while Mi Mi grows up in a close knit family. Do you see these differences reflected in the adults they become or in how they relate to each other?
3. After losing his sight, Tin Win studies at a monastery under U May. What does U May model for Tin Win, and how does Tin Win grow in these years?
4. Tin Win's uncle U Saw funds Tin Win's eye operation and education abroad but blocks all communication with Mi Mi. Is U Saw a villain, or is he something more complicated? Why?
5. Parts of the novel are written as letters. Does this form change the mood or flow of the story? How does it affect your view of the characters?
6. Tin Win and Mi Mi form a symbiotic bond: he walks for her and she becomes his eyes. They are then separated for decades. Given what you know about them, how are they able to endure the time apart?
7. Discuss the role of memory in the novel, both individual and collective. How does memory shape choices for Julia, Tin Win, and Mi Mi?
8. Burma, now Myanmar, was under British rule from the nineteenth century until 1948. How important is this colonial history to the novel's major events?
9. Prophecy and superstition are central to Burmese culture. Do these beliefs inspire a feeling of security or anxiety in the main characters, and why?
10. The book contrasts Western and Eastern values - individualism and personal achievement versus kinship and transcendence. Where and how are these differences brought to light?