

DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR THE SIEGE

The following topics could be used to prompt group discussions or could be considered by the individual reader while reading the book.

Helen Dunmore wanted her readers to be able to identify with the situation faced by the citizens of Leningrad. What techniques does she employ to achieve this? Does she succeed in her aim?

How are different types of responsibility a person might have – to the individual, to the family unit, to neighbours, to the collective – depicted? How are decisions made about where responsibility lies at any given moment?

What are the similarities between the two pairs of lovers (Mikhail and Marina, Anna and Andrei)? What are the differences?

VJ night celebrations in Bristol



How is nature depicted? How does this natural force relate to humanity's sense of control and to the power of the city?

What does it mean to be heroic in this situation? Who are the heroes of the book? Are there any villains? What does Helen Dunmore suggest are the keys to survival?

What does the book tell us about the relationship between the imagination and fact?
What is the role of memory?

Andrei 'pronounces the word "writer" with a mixture of respect and doubt'. What is the significance of the written word – plays, poetry, literature, diaries, reports – in the book?
What do stories mean to the characters?

Even before the siege, the citizens of Leningrad have lived in a climate of fear and suspicion, 'listening for the knock, trusting no-one and at risk from denunciation'. How does this affect the way people live their lives and relate to one another?

The book ends after only the first winter of the siege. We readers know that many more days of suffering lie ahead. What effect does this have on our relationship to the central characters? How would the book have differed if the story had been continued to the end of the siege?

