

Book Club Discussion Questions for THE RUSSIAN DAUGHTER by Sarah Klassen
CMU Press 2022

1. Many of the Ukrainian communities in this novel, including Kharkov, where Sofia is born, are once again places of conflict. The Russian wars of the early twentieth century are different from wars in our time – or are they? Discuss.
2. This novel is a frame tale, offering a few pages of prologue and then epilogue set in the 1920s, while the main body of the novel moves forward chronologically from the turn of the twentieth century. What would the novel be like without the prologue and epilogue? Did Sofia's presence in the prologue affect the way you approached the rest of the story?
3. Sarah Klassen's novel begins in the home of a young Mennonite couple in what is now Ukraine. In what ways could this story be about any community? What aspects of the characters' Mennonite faith are important to the novel?
4. What surprised you the most about the plot of this novel?
5. Sarah Klassen's work as a poet is respected and admired. Are there aspects of *The Russian Daughter* which indicate to you that she is a poet as well as a fiction writer?
6. The relations between the prosperous Mennonite farmers and the landless Russians who often worked for them may be surprising to some readers. What did you learn about the connection between these groups of people?
7. At the heart of this novel is Sofia.

More than anything Fia wants to grow. Tall and straight. Like Trudel Thielmann who towers above the other girls. "She's growing like a weed," her mother always says. The boys call her a stinkweed. Maybe wishing to be tall like Trudel is not smart after all. (p.38)

Sofia's small stature and the circumstances of her birth are a mystery which the reader experiences very much in the way Sofia experiences them herself. Discuss the ways in which Sofia's situation is realistically relayed to us.
8. Where do your sympathies lie in this story? Do they shift as the book progresses? Are there any characters who do not prompt your sympathy? Why or why not?
9. We could say this is a novel about family, about community, about belonging, about disability, about hardship and war. Which descriptions work best for you? What other ways would you describe this novel for a friend who might ask you about the experience of reading *The Russian Daughter*?
10. Why are the people of the village of Friedental so reluctant to emigrate even after many years of war? Would your decision have been different if you were in their place?