



## Reading Group Guide

1. What were some of the major differences between this epistolary novel and a story told in normal narrative style? What did you like and dislike about the format?
2. The prologue reveals that Jo is on trial for treason, and then it flashes back to the events of the year before. How did you feel about having a hint of where the plot was headed as the story progressed?
3. Citizens of actual towns located near POW camps had similar reactions to the use of POW labor on farms and factories as the ones recorded in the book. What concerns, if any, do you think you would have had if you had been in their place?
4. Jo repeatedly characterizes herself as “a disaster when it comes to relating to people.” Do you think her self-perception is accurate? Why or why not?
5. Which of the POW Potato Brigade newspaper columns written by the POWs or the camp staff was most interesting to you, and why?
6. Pastor Sorenson writes, “Sometimes showing grace breaks us before it heals us. Forgiveness can feel like a betrayal of justice. We want others to *deserve* grace, or at least ask for it.” Has there been a time when you’ve had a similar feeling when faced with a choice to forgive?
7. How did you feel about Stefan Werner throughout the book? Did you find anything about him sympathetic?

8. Peter and the Ito family, like many Japanese Americans, faced hard choices and prejudice during WWII. Do you agree with Peter's decision to first teach at a military intelligence school and then join the army? What would be the difficulties of such a decision?
  
9. Jo's scholarship donor advises her to "choose the better dream. Not the bigger dream—some of the most worthwhile pursuits can seem quite small to the undiscerning eye." How does that apply to the choices Jo makes? Have you chosen any "better dreams" in your own life?
  
10. As the events leading to the treason trial begin to be revealed, who were you most frustrated with?
  
11. How do you think Jo's history with Erik Sorenson affected her in the present? Do you feel that their story was resolved by the end of the book?
  
12. What qualities did you appreciate in Peter and Jo's relationship? Since you only see them interact through letters, how would you describe the way they helped each other in difficult times?
  
13. What were the biggest surprises you had as you reached the end of the book, including the postscript?
  
14. At the beginning of the story, Jo states, "I've found that every letter has two messages: the one written on the lines and the one written between them." What were some of the subtexts or hidden tensions that you noticed in the story?