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Discussion Group Guide/ THE HOLLOW GROUND

- 1) Ma and Gram have many failings as mothers. In what ways are they the same? In what ways different?
- 2) Daddy tells Brigid that Gram and Ma fight so much not because they hate each other, but because they love each other. He says that one of them has got to give the love first and they're each too stubborn to do it. "So they hold onto the love for each other and it turns all ugly inside them."
How accurate is Daddy's assessment of Gram and Ma's relationship? Is there any truth to his words?
- 3) Ma and Daddy are greatly influenced by their pasts. Memories and repressed memories—what they remember, what they don't remember, as well as what they misremember—shape who they are. Discuss how all these different types of memories contribute to how they perceive themselves and others.
- 4) In many ways THE HOLLOW GROUND is a story of survival. How well would you say Brigid survives? Do you think she has a chance at being happy in her adult life? Do you think this is also a story of survival for Ma?
- 5) In some ways Gram is a champion of women's rights. In other ways she subverts them. Discuss how she does both.
- 6) How does the author use the fire to help tell the story of this family?
- 7) Discuss the ways the novel explores the nature of love between a parent and child. Are there any limitations to that love?
- 8) THE HOLLOW GROUND could be viewed as a cautionary tale about what happens when we delve underground. Do you think mine fires such as the one that took place in

Barrendale could serve as an argument against other environmental issues of concern such as fracking or oil drilling?

- 9) Do you think Stepma did the right thing by sending Ma away? Do you think Ma is capable of forgiving her? Why or why not?
- 10) How is Auntie's story "The Great Forgetting" meaningful to the novel as a whole?