

**Book Group / Discussion Questions – *Visions of Johanna***

1. What roles do place/setting/neighborhoods play in the novel? Think of Chelsea, Appleton, Avon, Revere, Boston, the East Village, etc. Is the author able to anchor characters and readers to those locations? How is this accomplished? How do shore and inland locations set mood?
2. How are families depicted? Fathers—present and absent—are portrayed. Matt's mother is very present—why is that? Can you name and discuss some of the parents and the impact they had on the various characters?
3. How and when are food and meals employed?
4. What role does gardening play in the story? Flora and fauna?
5. How are the concepts of faith and hope introduced? How do hope and faith influence how the world is seen?
6. What are the visions of Johanna? Who have them?
7. Most of the relationship between Matt and Johanna takes place during the decade of the '80s. Were you able to recognize this? How or why? What was happening in the '80s that affected the characters?
8. What role—if any—does feminism play in the lives of the characters—both young and old?
9. Who are some of the female artists touched on in this novel? What role might their art play?
10. Are you able to name some of the allusions to specific paintings, films, songs, and literary works of art? What might be their significance?
11. How is the concept of equilibrium/balance addressed?
12. What role does music play in the lives of various characters?
13. What role do Johanna's jobs play in the novel? Why does she turn down the Andover job and accept the New York job? What about Matt's work?
14. In some ways, railroads/rail travel becomes a leitmotif in the story. What might be its significance? What are some other modes of transportation referenced?
15. How does hidden trauma play out in the novel? Why is Matt so reluctant to share his secret? And why doesn't Johanna tell Matt about her past? What roles do guilt and shame play in Matt and Johanna's traumas?

16. What fears are introduced? How do the characters address them? Do they?
17. What are the various mental health issues presented? How do some of the characters deal with them? How is mental illness handled in the novel? What role does our culture—then and now—play in managing mental illness?
18. What efforts did Johanna and other members of her generation make in order to support the women's movement? While reading the novel, did you believe that she and others were successful in having any impact in that regard? How? Why? Based on the June 2022 Supreme Court decision regarding Roe v Wade, what other tactics do you think might be employed to ensure that women receive equal rights?
19. How does Matt become a memory-keeper? Whose memories is he trying to preserve? What do we know now about dementia that we didn't know in the '80s?
20. Were you satisfied with the ending? Why? Why not? What might you have done differently? What were you hoping would happen?