



THE SISTERS OF THE WINTER WOOD

Reading Group Guide

1. *The Sisters of the Winter Wood* could be described as a coming-of-age novel. What do Liba and Laya change over the course of the novel? What do they learn?
2. Sisterhood is a theme of the novel, with questions raised about sibling bonds and the line between protecting your sister and stifling her. Do you think Liba and Laya have a strong bond? Do you agree with the choices each sister makes? How do those choices affect their relationship?
3. What is the significance of transformation in the novel?
4. The novel is told in two different writing styles: prose and verse. Why do you think the author made this decision? What do the writing styles reveal about each sister?
5. The story of Tati turning into a bear is based on a Hassidic folktale. Were you able to identify other elements of Jewish mythology and folklore through the novel? Based on your read, how would you define Jewish fantasy?
6. “Mami always says that fairy tales are real. With my head in my swan-mother’s lap, I start to believe – and I wonder which tale is ours.” What significance do fairy tales have on the novel? What similarities does *The Sisters of the Winter Wood* have to other fairy tales you’re familiar with?
7. The goblins’ arrival not only brings danger to Dubossary but also highlights the darkness living in the town. How is that darkness revealed? How does it affect Liba and Laya? Their parents? The Jews and non-Jews of Dubossary?
8. Set in early 20th century Eastern Europe, there are strict religious and social expectations placed on Liba and Laya. How do the sisters live up to those expectations? How do they shape Liba and Laya’s view of the future?
9. “The people of Dubossary are fierce. Let’s give them hope. Let’s help them believe that being a Jew is something worth fighting for.” Why is it important to tell stories of resistance?
10. The ending elaborated on Mami’s story about people becoming what they need to be in times of great need. Did this come as a surprise to you? In what way?

