

## Reading Group Guide

1. Much of the plot of *Clay's Ark* hinges on characters' choices in impossible circumstances. What are some of the most pivotal decisions and why were they made?
2. "He was going to fight diseases of the body and she, diseases of a society that seemed to her too shortsighted and indifferent to survive" (page 179). How do the diseases of the body and of society affect each other in *Clay's Ark*? In our own world?
3. Compare Jorah and Blake's different attitudes toward treating the "diseases of society." What do you think accounts for their different perspectives? To what extent does Blake's attitude change during his relationship with Jorah, and again when he is infected with the virus?
4. In what ways is *Clay's Ark*, which was originally published in 1984, predictive of real issues and crises in the United States in the years to come?
5. As Rane succumbs to the virus, she reflects that in her old life, she believed herself "stronger and smarter" than a gang member, but now she wonders if she was "merely untested" (193). Why do you think Rane believes she is stronger and smarter than the boy who returned to his gang life? In what ways are Blake, Keira, and Rane untested, and how are their fundamental beliefs, morals, and strength tested over the course of the novel?
6. Examine the relationship between sex and power in *Clay's Ark*. In what ways does the virus subvert or amplify preexisting power dynamics?
7. How does Eli try to retain his humanity in the face of the disease's demands on him? Do you think he succeeds?
8. Why do you think Keira is more receptive to the idea of being infected and giving birth to quadrupled children? Why does she ultimately decide to escape with her father anyway?
9. Eli explains Blake requesting his doctor's bag by saying, "It gives him the feeling he's doing something significant, something familiar that he can control" (124). How do other characters try to maintain control over their lives?
10. Compare the parent-child relationships in *Clay's Ark*. Why do you think some people are more able to accept their children's differences? How is Blake's relationship with Keira and Rane similar to and different from parents with quadrupled children?

11. Beyond the obvious physical changes and mental compulsions of the alien disease, in what other ways does it change its carriers? Are there benefits? Is it a parasitic or symbiotic relationship?
  
12. *Clay's Ark* differs from some pandemic narratives in that it focuses on how the disease has the strong potential to change—rather than destroy—humanity forever. Why do you think the author chose to explore this possibility? Why do you think she alternated between Eli's past viewpoint and Blake, Keira, and Rane's present day?