

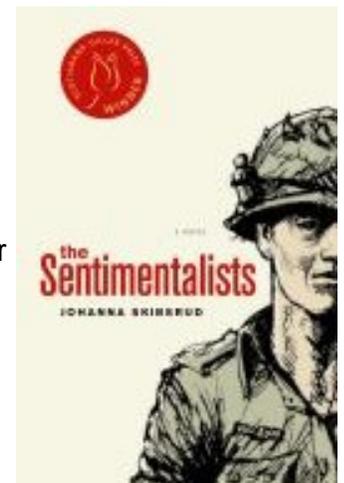


The Sentimentalists

Johanna Skibsrud

Discussion Questions

1. What is the meaning of the book's title?
2. One of Skibsrud's thematic concerns is the fragility and unreliability of memory. In what ways specifically, both large and small, does that theme play itself out in the novel? (Consider, for instance, the field glasses turned the wrong way around.)
3. Talk about the metaphor of Casablanca's having been flooded—and especially the canoe rides in which Henry and Napoleon's daughter skim over the place where Henry grew up.
4. What is Napoleon's relationship with his daughters? In what way has his war experience shaped his role as a father?
5. Discuss Napoleon's marriage and the narrator's mother with her depressive episodes.
6. Comment on Napoleon's statement, "Women think they can make sad things go away by knowing the reason that they happened." True, false, neither—not just the part about women, but also whether understanding why sad things happen is an antidote to sadness?
7. The Vietnam War is central to the second part of the book. What exactly happened during the war that has so deeply affected Napoleon? Is it possible to sort out the truth from all the conflicting accounts?
8. Does the narrator truly come to know her father at the end of his life...or by the end of this novel? What does she know, or understand, about him?
9. Johanna Skibsrud approaches the novel as a poet. Can you point to evidence of her poetry background in *The Sentimentalists*? Think about the rhythmic quality of her prose, her diction, the use of imagery and symbols.
10. How did you experience this book? Was it a difficult read for you? Did it hold your interest?





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About the Author

Johanna Skibsrud is the author of *The Sentimentalists*, winner of the 2010 Scotiabank Giller Prize, Canada's most prestigious literary award. Her other books include the poetry collections *Late Nights with Wild Cowboys* (shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Award) and *I Do Not Think That I Could Love a Human Being*. She lives in Montreal.

Skibsrud's Giller win also focused attention on the struggles of small press publishers. The book had been originally published by Gaspereau Press, a boutique firm based in Nova Scotia which is one of Canada's only book publishing companies that still binds and prints its own books, with the result that the firm had difficulty meeting the increased demand after Skibsrud's win was announced. Chapters-Indigo, Canada's primary bookstore chain, did not have a single copy of the book in stock anywhere in Canada in the entire week of the Giller announcement.

However, the paper book's unavailability resulted in a significant increase in ebook sales; the ebook version of the novel quickly became the top-selling title for Kobo devices. The company subsequently announced that it had sold the novel's trade paperback rights to Douglas & McIntyre, while it will continue to print a smaller run of the novel's original edition for book collectors. W.W. Norton & Company is the book's U.S. publisher.