

**SUGGESTED
READING GROUP
QUESTIONS FOR
PICKING BONES
FROM ASH**

◆ Satomi is told by her mother: “There is only one way for a woman to be truly safe in this world and that is to be fiercely, inarguably and masterfully talented.” Is Satomi safe in the end? At what cost? What about the other female characters—Akiko and Rumi? What does it mean for a woman to be safe?

◆ Satomi seeks out western music in Paris, Timothy yearns for spiritual enlightenment through Buddhism, and Francois reinvents himself in San Francisco. Discuss the ways in which these and other characters—and perhaps you yourself—find freedom through other cultures, and comfort in what is native.

◆ Satomi tells Rumi, “Here we are. A girl without a mother and a girl with too much of a mother. Which, I wonder, would most people rather be? One inherits history. The other is free to create it herself.” Do you think it is better to inherit history or to create a history for yourself?

◆ Francois teaches Rumi the importance of seeing “beauty out of context.” How does this skill help her later on? How does it relate to the Buddhist notion of seeing through illusion?

**“Deeply preoccupied with girls,
talent, and power.”**
—MAUD NEWTON

◆ Why do you think the ghost of Akiko revealed itself to Rumi and not to Satomi?

◆ Masayoshi says: “When parents and children can accept each other—no matter what that means—their relationships with everyone else will change.” How do you feel about this statement?

◆ How did Mockett’s use of interlocking stories and voices affect your reading experience?

◆ Mockett has been quoted as saying: “I felt it was important that any supernatural elements in my novel would be grounded in psychological truths, because that’s the ‘reality’ of true supernatural experiences.” How does the supernatural function within her story? Does it add atmosphere? Did it detract from the story?

◆ Akira says: “The world of the living can be like that of the dead. It is tragic when we lose ourselves in grief.” What do you think about this statement? Is it something that you or someone close to you has experienced?

◆ At the end of the novel, Akiko says to Satomi: “You look like a loved person. It always shows on people’s faces. The ones who discover love when they are much older always look startled.” Do you agree?



Photo: Eliza Griffiths

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