

Questions for Book Groups on *The Narrow Land*
Winner of the 2020 Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction

prepared by the author, Christine Dwyer Hickey

1. Many of the characters in *the Narrow Land* are not very likeable. Does this present a problem to the reader?
2. There are unlikely bonds formed between adult and children in this novel. Do they work or are they unrealistic?
3. There are several characters in his novel and yet the story is told from only four perspectives. All the remaining characters are observed by these four. What does this process lend to the book?
4. The writer quite often moves back and forth from the mind of a middle-aged woman to that of a child and then to an older man. Does she succeed in balancing this difficult strategy?
5. The party scene in this novel is almost 100 pages long. This is quite unusual. Did it work for you or do you feel it was too long?
6. The paintings of Edward Hopper are often associated with loneliness and isolation. Do you think this loneliness was apparent in the novel and did you think the author made good use of the paintings themselves within the story?
7. Jo Hopper - early feminist or self-serving oddball? Discuss. The reader's empathy is challenged by her depiction in this novel. Do you think she has been treated fairly?
8. Michael, as a German refugee, carries the weight of the war with him to America. How do you think the inheritance of guilt has impacted on his life? And what about Richie, also a victim – how has he been affected by the war?
9. Other artistic forms are brought to play in *the Narrow Land* e.g. Hopper's paintings and "*The Planets Suite*" by Gustav Holst. Did this make you want to look at Hopper's paintings or to listen to Holst's music?
10. The idea of refugees being welcomed into America in 1950 no matter what their origin seems very much at odds with the situation today. Why do you think this has changed?
11. Each character in the book seems to be struggling to find an identity. Do you think this strategy works?
12. Artistic marriages are notoriously difficult. How well has the marriage of Edward and Jo Hopper been drawn?
13. It has been said that this book resembles a painting in that it has been built in layers of tiny brushstrokes which come together at the end of the book to make sense as a whole. Do you agree or is this an overstatement?