

Discussion Questions The Four Winds

1. "Hope is a coin I carry. . . . There were times in my journey when it felt as if that penny and the hope it represented were the only things that kept me going." (pg. 1) What is the significance of the fact that it is an American penny? In what ways does hope anchor us in the moment, and in what ways does it push us forward? Do you or your family have any keepsakes that represent your family's hope for the future?

2. Life was very different for unmarried young women in earlier generations. Expectations for their future were sharply defined. How is Elsa shaped by these expectations and her failure to meet them? Do you think it would have been the same for her in New York City? Did you feel compressed by expectation when you were growing up? Do you think these societal expectations were designed to keep women "in their place"? How difficult is it to defy both family and society in a small town?

3. Motherhood changes Elsa in almost every way. What does she learn by becoming a mother? What does she learn about motherhood from Rose? How does motherhood strengthen a woman? How does it weaken her? How does Elsa remain "herself" after giving birth? How does she change?

4. The adolescent years can be especially difficult on mothers and daughters. Did you dislike Loreda during these years? Did you understand her?

5. There is a strong thread running through this novel about man's connection to the land. During the Dust Bowl, while many families went west in search of work and a better life, most of them stayed behind on their parched farms. Why do you think that is?

6. Why does Rafe leave and what is he chasing out west? Do you have sympathy for how broken he felt by the poverty and hardship? Should Elsa have agreed to go with him? How does Elsa aim to fill his void, and why does she believe she loves him even after the abandonment?

7. Life in California is not at all what the migrants expected, what advertisements had led them to believe. The locals treat them badly, and are afraid of them. Why is that? How

does the treatment of migrants in California during the Great Depression mirror the treatment of immigrants today? How is it the same? How is it different?

8. Discuss the shift in thinking that happens between generations—the freedoms longed for and the sacrifices required. The Greatest Generation was shaped by the Great Depression and World War II. They willingly sacrificed for each other and did what they could to help. How is the modern world different? How do we face our own dark times?
9. How does the Great Depression setting of *The Four Winds* compare to America during the pandemic? What lessons of resilience and healing might be embedded in this story? How might others' struggles inspire us? Do you have any family stories from the Depression?
10. Did you find the end of Elsa's and her family's journey satisfying? Where do you think Ant and Loreda ended up? How do you see Loreda's life being like her mother's? How will it be different?

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