

Questions for *Maisie Dobbs: A Novel*

By Kathy Harryman

Notation: There are questions for discussion on page 13 of the Penguin Readers Guide at the end of the novel. I have added a few questions that I would want to explore with the students regarding World War I and the present conflict in the Middle East.

1. On Page 146, Pricilla and Maisie have a conversation regarding F-A-N-Y, First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, an all women ambulance corps. Although currently not active in France, Mrs. McDougal, it's founder, is petitioning the War Office to use women drivers for the motor ambulances. Discuss a woman's role in a wartime situation. What is your opinion of a woman's role in a wartime situation? Do you agree or disagree with women in the armed services? Why or why not?
2. The Battle of the Somme has one of the most extensive casualties in World War I. By the end of the battle, in November 1916, the British had lost 420,000, the French lost nearly 200,000 men and the Germans 500,000. How would you respond if you had heard the news that there were "tens of thousands of casualties from the spring offensive of 1915" especially if only a small strip of ocean separated you from the battle. What would be your response? Why do young men go to war? Discuss
3. Enid works in a munitions factory making shells. Her skin has turned yellow and her hair sparks when she brushes it. Least I'm not just sitting on my bum while "them boys get shot to bits over there..." Discuss the sacrifices of the individuals who are left at home.
4. What happens to the communities surrounding the battlefields? . On page 171, "lines of people trudged along...whole families were leaving communities close to the battlefield, seeking a place of safety with relatives in other towns and villages." How does war affect them? What is left when they return? Does the victorious government have an obligation to these families? Does the world have an obligation to these families? Discuss
5. Name five things that Maisie suffered as a result of her decision to 'go to the front'.
6. What about the wounded men who return home after any war? How are they treated? How has life changed for them? How has life changed for their families?
7. What is the Retreat? Do you agree with the concept of a private place for maimed and disabled veterans of the war? Why? Or why not?