

My One Square Inch of Alaska

Discussion Questions

1. The novel opens with this line: “Later, MayJune would say that the biggest turns in life come when you’re paying the least attention, making small choices you don’t yet know will change everything.” How does this become an overarching theme throughout the book? How does it apply to Donna? To the rest of her family? To Babs and Jimmy?
2. Why do you think Donna’s grandmother treats her so poorly? Is it really because Donna reminds her so much of Rita? Or is there something else to it? Why does she change when Donna starts dating Jimmy?
3. When Donna’s grandmother brings her a slice of apple pie, Donna thinks to herself that she’d rather have coconut cream, and then notes that, “it startled me a little, this notion that I could have opinions.” She wonders where her newfound opinion came from. What do you think? How does “this notion” develop further over the course of the novel?
4. Jimmy asks Donna to be his girl, and though she’s happy, she thinks to herself that she “feels something slipping away.” What does she mean by this? Have you ever experienced a similar feeling?
5. Why do you think Will feels such a kinship with Mr. Stedman’s dog, Trusty? Why is he so determined to redeem his cereal box tops?
6. What did you think of Mr. Cahill’s reason for not bothering to really teach art to the students at Groverton High? What ultimately makes him change his mind and begin to try?
7. Why doesn’t Jimmy believe Donna when he sees her leaving Mr. Cahill’s house? Why do you think he immediately assumes the worst?
8. What did you make of Miss Bettina’s revelation about Rita? Can you understand why Porter lied to Donna and Will? How does Donna react?
9. Discuss Babs and Donna’s friendship. Did your opinion of Babs change over the course of the novel? How so? Why do you think Babs stays with Hank, despite his abuse?
10. Consider MayJune and her uncanny perceptions and wisdom. What do you think of her? How does her character serve to advance the plot?
11. How does Donna’s “small choice” to take Will to Alaska change her life, ultimately? Will’s?
12. Were you surprised by what Mr. Litchfield tells Donna and Will about Rita? Did the way Rita’s story ends make sense to you? What effect does this knowledge have on Donna and Will?
13. What does it mean to Will to be able to claim his land? Why is it so important to him that Donna follow her dreams of becoming a fashion designer? How does it help Donna to talk about this with Will?
14. What were your thoughts on the end of the novel? Does it seem like Donna has achieved her dreams? Do you feel hopeful for her?