**Discussion Questions**

The following questions are intended for general use with all titles in this theme. They have been developed encourage a deeper discussion among participants and to provide general guidance and direction. Facilitators and participants are encouraged to research, prepare, and engage with additional questions specific to the book they are discussing at each session.

1. Good life story writing, it’s been said often, encourages empathy, making readers think about their own experiences as they read about the central character’s. Can you find points of identification with the main character of this life story, even if his/her circumstances are very different than yours? What universal experiences, life stages, setbacks, hopes and fears, conflicts, and longed-for successes are evoked in this book?
2. On the other hand, we enjoy life stories because they open a window into ways of life that we haven’t encountered ourselves, broadening our picture of human experience. In what ways does this book show you new sides of life?
3. What is the “point” of this story? What is the writer trying to convey about the main character’s development and nature, and/or about the social context against which the life is set? Which anecdotes and descriptions in particular help bring that point home? Does the story seem over-determined--that is, too absolutely focused on one side of what must have been complex events, perhaps forcing a conclusion too neatly? Does this bother you, or under the circumstances does it seem ethical?
4. What details best set the story in context for you? What outstanding insights into a particular time and place does the book provide, along with getting to know the character?
5. Consider how the writer creates herself/himself as a character (in autobiography/memoir) or the subject(s) (in biography). Using the standards of fiction technique, evaluate the portrait. Is the character rounded or flat? Can you trace an evolution that makes sense, given what you know of human nature? Do you empathize? Which secondary characters especially set off main one(s)?
6. Does the “plot” make sense to you in terms of cause and effect? What scenes are especially pivotal, and do they ring true?
7. Does the book encourage you to look at your own life and/or the lives of others in a new way? How?
8. If you were to write your own life story, either full autobiography or memoir, what might its overall focus be? What kind of “story” would you impose on the innumerable events you’ve experienced? Which details would be most important, and which wouldn’t be as relevant? Could you tell several different stories? If several in your LTAI group are interested in these questions, consider adding a meeting dedicated to talking about the shapes your narratives might take and even sharing drafts.