



Cracked Pots

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Heather Tucker's invincible heroine, Ari Appleton, returns in *Cracked Pots*. With wit, tenacity, and the incessant meddling of Jasper — the seahorse in her head — Ari rides waves of devilry and discovery, calamity and creation, abandonment and atonement on a journey to find her true self. *Cracked Pots* is a diversely relatable story about what breaks us, rising after the blows, gathering the fragments, and piecing together a spectacular life through creativity, kindness, and belonging.

1 Ari faces many challenges because of her dysfunctional family and the harmful decisions her mother and father have made. What accounts for her resilience? What gives her the strength to keep going after each calamity?

Why are some characters able to succeed while others are not? Compare Ari's mother, Dick Irwin, and O'Toole to Aunt Nia, Todd, and Natasha's father.

2 *Cracked Pots* is a hymn to the extraordinary power of one — a teacher, a friend, a relative — to reach out and help. Who are the everyday heroes in the book? Which one do you relate to the most or which one do you aspire to be?

Can you remember a hero from your childhood?

3 Several of the characters in *Cracked Pots* are tragically flawed. Who is the most unlikeable? Are they believable to you? Do they remind you of anyone? How do they contribute to Ari's growth and resilience?

4 How does the time period (late '60s/early '70s) add to or detract from the novel? Could the same story have been told in present time?

How have discussions surrounding the topics of sexual, physical, and substance abuse changed since the '70s? How have attitudes toward Mary and Nia's relationship, police conduct, and teacher/student connections changed from the '70s to today?

5

If you could spend a day in Ari's world, which character would you like to spend time with? Where would you go and what would you do?

6

Hints of magic seem to accompany Ari on her journey. What role does the train conductor, William Walrus, play? What does the revelation of why he knows everything about Ari ultimately mean?

How and why does Ari use animal spirits to explain what she sees in people? Why are Ari and Jake seahorse spirits?

Do the possible rational explanations for the magical elements add to or detract from the story?

Did you ever have an imaginary friend like Jasper? Is there an animal you feel connected to in the way that Ari feels connected to seahorses?

7

Central to *Cracked Pots* is the theme of nature vs. nurture. How does Ari grapple with her familial history of violence and abuse? Is our destiny set in stone or is it clay?

Why do you think Byron hurt Natasha?

Do you think it was in Ari's nature to go back and help Mikey, or was it due to the influence of the nurturing adults in her life?

8

Ari and Jake have played a "what if" game since they were children. Who hasn't wondered at one time or another, "What if I had . . ."

What if Ari had stayed in Pleasant Cove instead of going back to Toronto to take care of Mikey?

What if Ari had said yes to Aaron coming to Antigonish to teach while she went to school?

What if Ari's injury meant she could never turn pots again?

What if after all the times she told Jasper to "shut up," he did?

9

Are there some memorable phrases or ideas that you took from *The Clay Girl*? Which one resonated most with you?

10

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum, making broken things more valuable. What does the book's title suggest?

Though Ari is shattered by many blows, she pieces together a beautiful life with her own hands and heart. Who and what are the gold that veins those cracks?

11

Aunt Nia sets Ari hunting for treasures in dark places. What gold have you found in the difficulties you've faced?