



# *At Sea in a Sieve*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Award-winning novelist Cordelia Strube's latest, *At Sea in a Sieve*, is a sharp and moving portrait of Ray, a judge, single parent, and tightly leashed woman whose survival strategies seem suddenly to be coming apart.

1 Michael Ondaatje once said that writers have a driving question that they are seeking to answer in their fiction. What do you think is Cordelia's?

2 Ray is a superior court judge and the novel balances serious, often heartrending courtroom scenes with more playful character portraits of the judges in their communal back chamber space. Which of Ray's cases were most interesting to you? And what do you think of Strube's strategy of counterpointing tragedy and humour?

3 In all her novels, Strube writes indelible portraits of her side characters – funny, incisive, revealing personalities that are as memorable as the main protagonists. Who are your favourites in this book?

4 Ray is ferociously protective of her daughter, Armada, and just as ferociously mistrustful of the world. Grief and disappointment colour all Ray's decisions and choices. What do you think of how she has (or has not) dealt with the family trauma she carries?

5 Animals are often redemption angels in Strube's books. In this one, it's chickens and a donkey. Do you think they work well as a device, and, if so, why?

6

Ray's survival strategy is to push most people away, a habit of emotional isolation that becomes increasingly impossible as the pieces of her life begin to unravel. Where do you see the cracks and turning points that force her reckoning?

7

Strube's books tackle dark moments of the human heart but they are also deeply funny. And, in the end, her protagonists make a kind of peace with their lives. Where do you think Ray might choose to go from here?