

City of Thieves Reading Guide

1. David wants to hear about his grandfather's experiences firsthand. Why is it important for us to cultivate and preserve our oral histories? Do you have a relative or friend whose story you believe should be captured for posterity?
2. Lev's father is taken—and almost certainly killed—by the NKVD, yet Lev himself stays behind to defend Leningrad. How do you think he reconciled his patriotism to his love for his father?
3. In the midst of a major historical moment, Lev is preoccupied with thoughts of food and sex. What does this tell us about experiencing history as it unfolds?
4. From the cannibals in the market to the sex slaves in the farmhouse, there are numerous illustrations of the way in which war robs us of our humanity. In your opinion, what was the most poignant example of this and why?
5. Kolya tells Lev that the government should "put the famous on the front lines" (p. 67) rather than use them as the spokespeople for patriotic propaganda. Do you agree or disagree? Can you think of any contemporary instances of this practice?
6. Aside from the sly pride that Lev notices, are there any other clues that give Kolya away as the true author of *The Courtyard Hound*?
7. Do you think Markov's denouncer should have remained silent about the partisan's presence? Did either of them deserve to die?
8. Even moments before Lev pulls his knife on the Sturmbannführer, he thinks: "I had wanted him dead since I'd heard Zoya's story. . . . [But] I didn't believe I was capable of murdering him" (p. 228). Do you think everyone—given the right motivation—is capable of killing another human being? Could you?
9. Lev takes an instinctive dislike to Kolya yet comes to consider him his best friend. What was the turning point in their relationship?
10. Lev says that Vika "was no man's idea of a pinup girl," (p.149) but he is instantly infatuated. Would he have been drawn to her had they met in different—safer—circumstances?

Adapted from www.penguin.com