

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

A Whole Life by Robert Seethaler, translated by Charlotte Collins

1. Does the story and do the images of Horned Hannes frame Andreas Egger's life in positive or menacing ways?
2. How do changes in technology have impact on Egger's life? For example, how are radio and television important and pivotal, or not? Discuss two other types of technology (such as modes of transportation, including cable cars, automobiles and buses) that either touch Egger's life or that he avoids or misses.
3. "In the night Egger was woken by a peculiar noise" (p. 59). And so begins the life changing sequence of events caused by an avalanche, described in a succinct but riveting series of paragraphs. Give examples from that section of the story that capture the avalanche's power, Egger's disorientation, and his fear and frustration in the aftermath.
4. What characteristics of Egger's personality made him an excellent and specialized worker for Bittermann & Sons, the company that constructed the cable car network in the Austrian Alps? Later in life, how does Egger come to be such an accomplished mountain tour guide? Is the job a surprising choice for him?
5. At the beginning of Egger's story, Horned Hannes speaks chillingly (pun intended!) of the Cold Lady, who seems to be a menacing figure. Later in life, Egger believes he has encountered the Cold Lady himself and perhaps troubling, "[he] saw only the nape of her neck and the reddish sickle of her scar shimmering upon it" (p. 138). What does this mean?
6. "There are people lying stiff and cold in the snow and I am still looking at the stars. Perhaps you can see the stars, too" (p. 88). As he is fighting to survive in a Russian prison camp in World War II, Egger stops at one point to write a letter to Marie, which he then buries in the earth. Why does he do this?

7. What do you believe was the greatest trauma in Egger's life? What brought him his most profound joy?
8. In Egger's final encounter with his childhood tormenter, Kranzstocker, the old man begs Egger to strike him dead. Does Kranzstocker simply want to be put out of the misery he feels for how his own life and health have turned out, or does he actually feel some remorse for what he did to Egger?
9. "Over and over again he had hung his life on a thread between heaven and earth" (p. 141), is a beautiful way to describe a life. Does Egger's have a good one or is it hard and disappointing? What is your assessment? What do you think would be Egger's assessment, and would it be different than yours?
10. "Andreas Egger died one night in February. Not somewhere out in the open, as he had often imagined" (p. 141). Does where Egger draws his final breath surprise you, or do you find it fitting?
11. What do you think is the memory that flashes before Egger at the end of the story? How is that memory connected to his last words in the story?