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**BOOK CLUB
DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

BOOK TITLE: Napoleon's Gold: A Legend of the Saint Lawrence River

AUTHOR: Thomas Pullyblank

- The events of September 11th and its aftermath are a major theme in the opening scenes of the book. What does that day mean to Tom Flanagan? What do the events of 9/11 mean to him and other characters later on in the story?
- Does Tom leave New York City for the Thousand Islands to escape from something or to seek for something?
- Which one of the River Rat Reporters is your favorite upon their initial introduction in chapters three and four? Which one is your favorite at the end of the story?
- Have you ever been to the Thousand Islands? Does the description of the place in chapter five of *Napoleon's Gold* ring true?
- How would you describe Billy Masterson's spiritual life as it relates to the Saint Lawrence River? To Napoleon's gold?
- Why is Captain Jim Pembroke so fixated on the idea of hubris? What does the word mean to him in the context of his personal life and experience?
- Why was the bicentennial year 1976 such an important one in the context of the story?
- What role did Mike Slattery play in Mary Flanagan's life? How did that role translate in Mike's relationship with Tom Flanagan over two decades later?
- Which of the River Rat reporters has the most benign attitude towards the river? Which Reporter's attitude is most anxious towards the river?
- Music played a significant role in Mary Flanagan's life. Which song on the playlist at the end of the book best describes her relationship with the river? With her husband Charlie?
- Do you agree with Charlie Flanagan or Ben Fries on the question of which revolution, the American or French, was more significant? What impact did the French Revolution have on Mary Falanagan's family history, as she tells it later on in the story?
- How does the fictional organization Preserve the Islands compare with the real organization Save the River?
- Take a walking tour of Alexandria Bay's many taverns. Which one best resembles your conception of Jimmy's?
- Play the historian's party game that Tom Flanagan considers at the beginning of chapter thirteen. Would you want to encounter a loved one from the past and ask questions about his/her life? If so, what would you ask?
- Part one of the novel is very much about how the different characters interpreted Napoleon as a historical figure and the impact he had on history, including the history of the Thousand Islands, and also including the personal histories of the characters themselves. Which character do you most closely identify with in this regard? Do you love Napoleon, as Mary Flanagan did, or do you despise him, as Mindy McDonnell did?

Book Club Discussion Questions, Page 2 - Napoleon's Gold by Thomas Pullyblank

- Discuss the distinction Raphael Ostend makes between belief and fact. At the point of the story in which he makes it, is belief or fact more useful in understanding what Napoleon's gold is and what it might mean?
- How does Raphael Ostend's explanation of "true philosophy" apply to what you later learn about Napoleon's gold?
- What trait did Napoleon, Lady Ostend and Naguib Malqari have in common in relation to the "guardians" of Napoleon's gold? What other characters share this trait?
- What is the biggest surprise Tom receives at the Ostend Ball? Which surprise has the most impact on the course of the events which follow?
- Based on what you know about Tom Flanagan's family history, is Andrew Hibbard correct in his assessment of his cousin? Is Tom a prodigal son who squandered his parents legacy and money?
- Andrew Hibbard says that the truth of Napoleon's gold resides in the foundation of the Hibbard family story. How does this statement relate to the way the Hibbard family story is told in the novel?
- According to the description in the story, how has Thousand Islands Park changed over the years?
- Of all the River Rat Reporters, Andrew Hibbard is the one identified by Tom as a man of action. How does this characterization bear out in the course of the story?
- Discuss the roles Egypt and things Egyptian play in the background of both Raphael Ostend's and Mary Flanagan's stories. Is there a connection between the two?
- How do Tom's experiences in part three of the novel connect him more deeply to his family's past?
- Did your opinion of Napoleon Bonaparte change at all after reading part three of the novel?
- What gift did Naguib Malqari receive from the "guardians" of the river? Did any other characters in the story receive a gift from them?
- Does Billy Masterson's part in the story end in triumph or in tragedy?
- What does Tom finally find out about what happened to his parents and brother on Labor Day, 1996? How are the events of that day significant in the larger context of the story?
- On the sheet of paper Tom produced during his first meeting with the River rat Reporters at Jimmy's, Martin Comstock's name had question marks next to it, indicating that Charlie Flanagan did not know Martin's personal story about Napoleon's gold. How is this explained by the end of the novel?
- What unfinished business does Tom Flanagan have after his final conversation with the bishop?