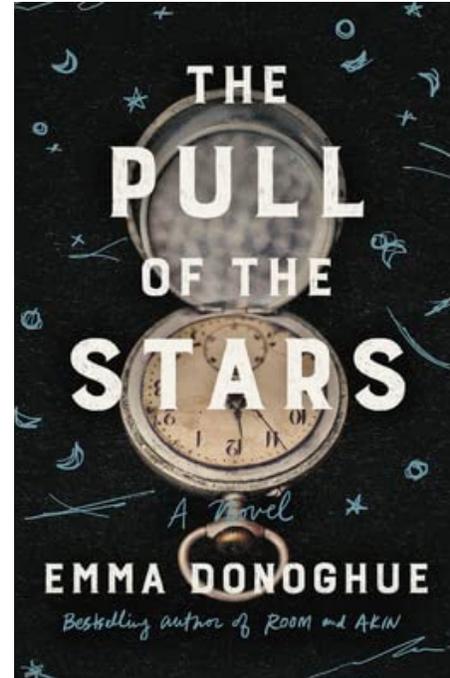


1. How has the current pandemic changed the way you approach *The Pull of the Stars*? What similarities do you see between the pandemic in the novel and the one we're living through now? What details are different?
2. Do you think that people will be more or less likely to read this novel now in light of what is going on? Do you think that your own opinion of the novel is influenced by your response to the day-to-day realities of living amidst COVID-19?
3. World War I is reaching its end and Julia's home country, Ireland, is in the midst of political turmoil regarding Home Rule. How does this total lack of normalcy affect Julia and the other characters? Do you think that the novel does a good job of balancing these various world events?
4. Discuss the intersections where the war, the influenza, and the civil unrest all meet:
 - a. How do the crises allow Julia to operate differently than she might have in a more normal era?
 - b. Would the novel have unfolded in the same way if the influenza had been an isolated incident, and Julia and the others did not have to deal with the war or the heightened Irish politics? How might it have changed?
5. Throughout the novel, Julia clashes with various members of the church, particularly Sister Luke. Does *The Pull of the Stars* have a deliberate anti-religion message? Is it a condemnation of human rights abuses perpetrated by those who claim to be against them?
 - a. One particularly memorable offense detailed is when Bridie tells Julia about the priest who thought it improper to leave teenaged daughters with a widowed father and Julia balks at the depravity and hypocrisy of such a statement coming from a priest: "For a priest to make such a comment—somehow both prudish and filthy-minded..." (182). Why do you think Donoghue included details like this?
6. Discuss Groyne as a character. How much sympathy are we meant to feel for him? Are we meant to feel as Julia does, that he is an unlikeable chauvinist? Or should we, like Bridie, look deeper to see the tragedies that lie beneath the surface?
7. What do you make of Julia's relationship with Bridie? How do the two of them even each other out?
 - a. Consider the things that Julia is able to teach Bridie and the things that she entirely overlooks until Bridie points them out to her. Would their relationship have flourished in other circumstances? Would their relationship have even been **possible in other circumstances**?



8. Julia delivers many babies over the course of the novel, and she gets every single possible combination. Delia Garrett's baby dies, but she lives. Both Ita Noonan and her child die. Both Mary O'Rahilly and her baby live. Honor White dies, but her baby lives. Why is it important to see this full spectrum of life and death? What do you make of the fact that, before Julia is placed in charge of the ward, not a single woman with influenza had gone into labor?
9. Discuss Bridie as a character. Were you surprised to learn about her abusive upbringing, or did you see the clues before Julia did? Why do you think that author Emma Donoghue chose to reveal so much of Bridie's character towards the end of the novel instead of spreading it out throughout?
 - a. What do you think of Bridie's lie about previously having the grippe? Was it heroic, particularly with regards to the fear most other characters display, or was it stupid? Was it dishonest for Bridie to lie to get into the room? Should she have told the truth and given Julia the chance to have an assistant who could be with her long-term? Did you like Bridie? How surprised were you by her sudden death? What foreshadowing—if any—did you pick up on?
10. Discuss the title. Julia tells us that the word influenza means "the influence of the stars. Medieval Italians thought the illness proved that the heavens were governing their fates, that people were quite literally star-crossed" (147).
 - a. Are mortals like Julia defenseless against the push and pull of fate, of a force as powerful as the influenza? Consider her later statement that "I'd never believed the future was inscribed for each of us the day we were born. If anything was written in the stars, it was we who joined those dots, and our lives were the writing" (244).
 - b. Do Julia, Bridie, and the others ultimately submit to the pull of the stars, or do they escape their fate? Also discuss the idea of the influenza as a living entity.