

Discussion questions for *Needlemouth*

1. At the beginning of the novel, each of the three girls (Cindy, Mandy, and Yangyang) are coping with the claustrophobia and oppressive nature of their realities. In what ways do you think they're similar? In what ways do you think they are different or divergent in how they've chosen to survive?

2. Each of the three girls is tied to a formative intergenerational relationship, and the lives and voices of their mothers and grandmother shape not only their present but their unfurling choices. What relationships have shaped and formed you, and what are the ways in which you resist or embrace your lineage, whether chosen or inherited?

3. Both personal and collective forms of storytelling coexist in this novel, such as oral stories, written diary entries, spoken testimony, and moments of intimate confession. How does this novel play with the ideas of the personal vs. the collective, the private vs. public, and the spoken vs. the unsaid?

4. What does Needlemouth represent to each of the main characters, and what does she mean to you? How does she change—or stay the same—from beginning to end? What do you envision for her future, beyond the final pages of this book?

5. What cycles do you identify in this novel, whether they're cyclical relationships, cyclical trauma, or cycles of death, renewal, or rebirth? To what extent do you think that cycles are binding, and to what extent can they present opportunities? Which cycles do you wish to break?

6. Much of this novel is grappling with monstrosity and ideas of goodness and evil, often bound to a familial, social, and/or gender role. How do you see the presence of evil in this novel, and how might that reinforce or subvert your own definition of evil? If you could create a monster that might free you, what might this monster look or act like? What would it tell you?

7. Memory plays a prominent role in the novel, and the act of confronting, reckoning with, or learning to live with a memory drives much of the characters' journeys. Do you see the act of remembering as positive or negative in the context of the story, or do you see it as something else entirely?

8. Do you view the ending of this novel as tragic or hopeful or something in between? What do you wish for each of the main characters? What do you wish for yourself?

9. The original and unused title of the novel's first draft was *Rage Will Be Your Savior*. Do you think this title is still relevant to the final version of the book? How does rage save or fail to save the three girls in this story? What role does rage play in your own life?

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