

## **READERS' GUIDE FOR LAND OF STONE**

1. *Land of Stone* is the story of Ben, a silent patient at a psychiatric hospital, and Karen, a poet at work there. For two years, they met every week and wrote poems, alternating lines, passing a pad and pencil back and forth. During that time, Ben began to speak. Thinking about the story in a broader context, did you come away with new ideas about the meaning of human relationships? About human communication?
2. Ben is a man with a serious mental illness. Karen is a poet who was stricken with polio as a child. Did their story alter your view of people beset with psychiatric problems? Did it give you insights into the effects of physical disease?
3. As silent Ben forms a relationship with the poet, and as they write together, gradually Ben chooses to speak. After reading this story, do you understand silence in a new way?
4. Talking out loud is universally common to almost all of us. People have said "After reading *Land of Stone*, I see language differently." Do you? If so, how?
5. *Land of Stone's* setting is unique - a locked ward. The main characters come to know each other in a unique way - poet and patient writing together. Despite its uniqueness, is there something universal about collaboration, listening and pacing in this book?
6. The author views her work with Ben as writing teacher. Others argue that the work was "therapy." What do you think?
7. In the book, the author describes her childhood experiences as a little girl with polio. How do you think this affected her work with Ben?
8. Did certain parts of the book make you uncomfortable? If so, did you come to any new understandings because of this discomfort?

9. Was there anything in the book that surprised you? If so, why? Was it illuminating?
10. The story takes place on a psychiatric ward. From your own observations -- through books, movies or personal experiences -- does the setting ring true to you?
11. The author's writing style is stark and direct. What else can you say about the style of writing? Does the style enhance or detract from the story?
12. After reading *Land of Stone*, do you see poetry in a new light? If so, how?
13. Has the book increased your interest in the book's main subjects - silence, kinship, mental illness, or poetry?