

## Discussion Questions for *The Overstory*

1. *The Overstory* is split into four sections: Roots, Trunk, Crown, and Seeds. How do those sections reflect the thematic numerous concerns of the novel—that human development (in the micro and macro) mimics growth in the "natural world," that human beings are deeply, intimately bound to nature?

2. Follow-up to Question 1: The Hoel family keeps a photographic record of the American chestnut tree in their field. In what way does this photographic record of the tree's life mirror the family's own life?

3. Of the novel's nine opening stories, which do you find most engaging? Is that because you find the characters more compelling ...or the storyline itself ... or can't the two be separated?

4. What do you make of Patricia Westerford's statement:

*You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor. A billion and a half years ago, the two of you parted ways. But even now, after an immense journey in separate directions, that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes.*

5. Westover also says, "Forests panic people. Too much going on there. Humans need a sky." Do you panic in deep forests? (Forests are different than the lovely shaded groves and glens where we love to picnic.)

6. How does the author treat eco-warriors: are they the novel's heroes? Does he seem sympathetic to their causes ... or impatient with their stridency? What is *your* attitude toward eco-warriors, both the ones in the novel and the ones in real life?

7. Some reviewers claim that characters in *The Overstory* get short-shrift, that they are subsumed by the book's ideas. Others say the book's characters are convincing and invested with humanity. Which view do you agree with? Do the characters come alive for you, are they multifaceted, possessing emotional depth? Or do you see them as fairly one-dimensional, serving primarily as the embodiment of ideas?

8. Has Powers novel changed the way you look at trees? Have you previously read, for instance, *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben, *Lab Girl* by Hope Jahren, or Annie Proulx's novel, *Barkskins*?

9. What might the title, *Overstory*, signify? What is the pun at its heart?

10. What of this observation on the part of the lawyer who turns to novels for solace but then seems to question their value? *To be human is to confuse a satisfying story with a meaningful one.... The world is failing precisely because no novel can make the contest for the world seem as compelling as the struggles between a few lost people.*

Source: [www.litlovers.com](http://www.litlovers.com)

