



“Adept, unforgettable,
and brilliantly unsettling.”

—KATE QUINN

A NOVEL

CRADLES OF THE REICH

JENNIFER COBURN

Reading Group Guide

1. Gundi, Hilde, and Irma have starkly different attitudes toward the Nazi regime and their places at Heim Hochland. Who did you most identify with? Who did you find most compelling as a character?
2. Compare Hilde's and Gundi's experiences during the November pogroms the Nazis called Kristallnacht. Did either of them really understand the broader context of this event?
3. As Hilde tries to impress Nazi officials, she represses her conscience to say the right things. What motivates her to seek status within the Reich? What does Hilde want out of life?
4. How did the Reich's propaganda about self-sacrifice smooth the way for Lebensborn homes to function?
5. There are many examples of the Reich's coordinated effort to dehumanize Jews, from the picture book about poisonous mushrooms to the documentary *The Eternal Jew*. How do these materials relate to Lotte's insistence that "great things only happen when strong people make difficult choices"?
6. Put yourself in Gundi's shoes when she learns that the father of her child has been framed for a crime and sent to a labor camp.

Would you be able to keep your secret? Would you look for a way to help Leo?

7. While the book focuses primarily on birth mothers, adoptive parents are an enormous part of the machinery of the Lebensborn Society. What circumstances led Germans to become adoptive parents? How, as in the case of the “displaced” Polish orphans, does adoption contribute to genocide?
8. How does Gundi’s self-image get in the way of her first attempts to find Leo and get to know him?
9. Gundi’s escape from Heim Hochland almost fails several times. Which close call made you the most nervous?
10. Irma says she doesn’t want to live in a world where helping people survive is remarkable. How can we make that more ordinary in the modern day?