

Reading group questions for THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

1. This novel is set in early autumn, with many references to apples throughout. What are some of those references, and what are some of their symbolic meanings?
2. In Chapter 4 there is a discussion about whether one can or should separate the quality of art from the character of the artist. "You're an artist," Reine-Marie says to Clara. "Do you think a work should be judged by its creator? Or should it stand on its own?" What do you stand on this issue?
3. How unsettling did you find the murder of a child in the story? Did you feel it was handled with appropriate respect and sensitivity? How does the author deal with the effects of the death on his friends and family?
4. The painful search for Laurent in the woods is made even more painful by the scene in which the young policemen taunt Gamache. How do you see him at that moment? Does he respond as you'd wish?
5. Ruth says in Chapter 34, "I was nice once, you know. And kind. Perhaps not the most kind, or the nicest, but it was there." How do you view her character then and now? What guilt and other demons is she wrestling with?
6. What do you think of Professor Rosenblatt, Mary Fraser and Sean Delorme? Why do you think they have come to Three Pines, and how does Three Pines look to you through their eyes?
7. As he struggles with regrets over Laurent, the past and present threat of Fleming, and decisions about his future, what tough choices does Gamache need to make in the course of the story? What do you think of his decisions?
8. How does Clara evolve from the beginning of the book to the end (and/or, if you have read the previous books, throughout the series)?
9. How do you view Reine-Marie, both as Armand's wife and as a character in her own right?
10. This is the first novel in which Louise has included an historical note. How does the added background affect your view of the story?

11. How do you interpret the book's title? Ruth quotes from Yeats's poem *The Second Coming*: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born." What is the beast? In the poem? In the book? What do those lines mean to you?

12. The attractions of Three Pines are clearly immense, but so are its dangers: As Beauvoir says, "Where else would the devil go, but to paradise?" If it were a real place, what do you think it would be like to live there?