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Discussion Questions

From www.eowynivey.com

1. When Mabel first arrives in Alaska, it seems a bleak and lonely place to her. Does her sense of the land change over time? If so, how?

2. Why are Jack and Mabel emotionally estranged from each other in the beginning of the novel, and how are they able to overcome that?

3. How do Esther Benson and Mabel differ in temperament, and how does their friendship change Mabel?

4. The first time Garrett sees Faina in person is when he spies her killing a wild swan. What is the significance of this scene?

5. In what ways does Faina represent the Alaska wilderness?

6. Jack and Mabel’s only child is stillborn. How does this affect Mabel’s relationship with Faina?

7. When Jack is injured, Esther and Garret move to their farm to help them. How does this alter Jack and Mabel’s relationship?

8. Much of Jack and Mabel’s sorrow comes from not having a family of their own, and yet they leave their extended family behind to move to Alaska. By the end of the novel, has their sense of family changed? Who would they consider a part of their family?

9. Death comes in many forms in The Snow Child, including Mabel giving birth to a stillborn infant, Jack shooting a moose, Faina slaying a swan, the fox killing a wild bird, Jack and Mabel slaughtering their chickens, and Garrett shooting the fox. Why is this one of the themes of the book and what is the author trying to say about death?

10. What do you believe happened to Faina in the end? Who was she?
About Eowyn Ivey

Eowyn (pronounced A-o-win) LeMay Ivey was raised in Alaska and continues to live there with her husband and two daughters. Her mother named her after a character from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*.

The *Snow Child* is Eowyn’s debut novel. Her essays and short fiction have appeared in London’s *Observer Magazine, Sunday Times Magazine, Sunday Express Magazine, Woman & Home Magazine*, the anthology *Cold Flashes*, the North Pacific Rim literary journal *Cirque, Five Chapters, and Alaska Magazine*.

Prior to her career as a bookseller at Fireside Books and a novelist, Eowyn worked for nearly a decade as an award-winning reporter at the *Frontiersman* newspaper. Her weekly articles about her outdoor adventures earned her the Best Non-Daily Columnist award from the Alaska Press Club.

Eowyn earned her BA in journalism and creative writing though Western Washington University’s honors program and studied creative nonfiction in University of Alaska Anchorage’s graduate program. She is a contributor to the blog *49 Writers* and a founding member of Alaska’s first statewide writing center.

The *Snow Child* is informed by Eowyn’s life in Alaska. Her husband is a fishery biologist with the state of Alaska. While they both work outside the home, they are also raising their daughters in the rural, largely subsistence lifestyle in which they were both raised.

As a family, they harvest salmon and wild berries, keep a vegetable garden, turkeys, and chickens, and they hunt caribou, moose, and bear for meat. Because they don’t have a well and live outside a public water system, they haul water each week for their holding tank and gather rainwater for their animals and garden. Their primary source of home heat is a wood stove, and their harvest and cut their own wood.

These activities are important to Eowyn’s day-to-day life as well as the rhythm of her year.

From www.eowynivey.com
The Story of Snegurochka (Sn - egg - or - itch - ka), the Snow Girl

From http://www.therussianstore.com/blog/the-snow-maiden/

Very, very long ago in an Old Russian village there lived an old couple: the woodcutter and his wife. They barely made the ends meet, owing to the old man who cut logs in the forest and carried them into the nearest town. They were poor and had no children, so as they grew older they became sadder and sadder. The old woman often asked, “Who will take care of us? We are so old.”

Her husband used to answer, “Don’t worry, old woman. God will not leave us alone, he will help us, if necessary.”

One cold winter day they both went to the forest, the old man to chop wood and his wife to help him. The frost that day was severe. The old man said, “Shall we make a little snow-girl to solace us, as we have no child?” In a short time they had made a “Snegurochka” – a Snowmaiden. It was so beautiful that no tale could describe it and no pen could portray it.

“If only the almighty Lord had sent us a little girl looking like this Snegurochka,” the old woman said.

Suddenly the Snowmaiden’s eyes twinkled and she became alive, may be owing to the strong desire of the poor good people. There was a precious tiara on her head, her hair was white as snow, a brocade cape covered her shoulders, and embroidered boots were on her feet. The woodcutter and his wife were amazed and could not believe their eyes. Snegurochka breathed, trembled and stepped forward. They grew numb thinking they were dreaming. Snegurochka came toward them and said, “Good afternoon, kind folks, do you want to be my parents? I will be a good daughter to you and honor you as mother and father.”
“You will be the joy of our old age. Come home with us,” answered the old man and they led her from the forest.

Snegurochka began to live with the old couple, helping them. She was kind and beautiful, always respectful, never contradicted them, so they were very proud of her. But she was always pale and a girl of few words, and this troubled her adopted parents. But her eyes shone like little stars, and her smile lighted up the hut. Time passed. One day the old woman said to Snegurochka, “Why are you so shy, my darling daughter? You always stay at home with us, you don’t have friends. Why do you not show yourself and see people? You should not spend all your time with us, old people.”

“I am happy here and don’t want to go out,” replied Snegurochka.

Festival time came. The streets were lively, strollers were singing from early morning until late night. And Snegurochka finally decided to go outside and to join the merrymaking people. In that village lived many nice maidens, one of them was a true beauty named Kupava. Her hair was black as a raven’s wing, her skin was pale as moonlight. Some time ago, a rich merchant came through that country. His name was Mizghir; he was young, handsome and tall. He saw Kupava and he liked her right away. Kupava was not a shy girl, she was dashing and glib, and never turned down an invitation to stroll. Soon Mizghir became Kupava’s love.

That festive day Kupava, the belle of that place, was parading around in silks and velvets and serving sweet wines to the young men and maidens. When Snegurochka first went out to the street she met Kupava, who introduced all her friends to her. Since then, Snegurochka began to come out more often. There was a young shepherd named Lel, who could play on a flute the beautiful music, they pleased each other and became inseparable. Whenever the young girls came out for walking and singing, Lel would run to the woodcutter’s hut, tap at the window and say, “Snegurochka, my darling, came out and join us in dancing.” Once she appeared, he never stepped aside from her.

One day the merchant Mizghir came to the village when the maidens were dancing outside. He and Kupava joined in and were joyful. Mizghir noticed the new girl, Snegurochka, and she struck him with her tender beauty and whiteness. He liked her; she seemed to him so pale and so pretty. From then on, Kupava seemed to him too dark and rustic, and finally he found her to be unpleasant. There were often quarrels between them and then Mizghir stopped seeing her.
What could Kupava do? She could not be loved by force nor return to the past. Kupava and other people noticed that Mizghir often returned to the village and visited the house of the woodcutter and his wife. It was rumored that Mizghir asked them for Snegurochka's hand in marriage. Kupava's heart trembled when she heard, and she ran to Snegurochka to reproach and insult her.

“I will go to the Tsar! I am not going to suffer this dishonor!” Kupava made such a scandal that she was forced to leave.

And Kupava went to Tsar Berendey looking for help against Snegurochka, as if she had stolen her lover. Tsar Berendey was wise and gracious ruler; he loved truth and used to solve different disputable questions of his people. He listened to Kupava and ordered Snegurochka to appear in front of him. The woodcutter's family was frightened, but the Tsar's word was the law, so they helped their daughter to get ready and accompanied her in order to present her to the Tsar.

Within the Tsar's palace they stood amazed, the vast courtyard was filled with people, Snegurochka was afraid to take a step and to raise her eyes. Then she looked around and saw the beauty and refinement of internal decoration and began to make the round of the Tsar's chamber, touching the carved patterns and gold cups, painted icons and rich carpets. Meanwhile Tsar Berendey came in, sat in his gilded and sculptured throne and looked after Snegurochka wondering at her beauty and delicacy. Boyars, wearing tall hats of bear fur trimmed with gold, were sitting on the benches covered with carpets and brocades, bodyguards in caftans white as snow holding silver axes and everyone present waited, keeping silence for the Tsar's word.

“Come here, young maiden,” said Tsar Berendey. “Don't be afraid and answer my questions. Did you commit the sin of severance the two lovers one from another by way of stealing the heart of Kupava's beloved? Did you flirt with him and are you going to marry him? Tell me only the truth.”

Snegurochka approached the Tsar, bowed low and told the truth: that she did not know what her fault was, that she was pure in body and soul, that merchant Mizghir had asked for her in marriage, but she did not like him and she refused his hand.
Tsar Berendey took Snegurochka’s hand and looked into her eyes. And he realized that she spoke the truth, but moreover he saw in her eyes that she was unhappy, because she could not love at all, she was like a snowflake – beautiful, fragile but cold, and that she wanted to love, but was not able. He was sorry for her and said, “I see that you are not at fault. Go home in peace now and don’t be upset.” And the Tsar let Snegurochka leave with her parents.

Following the girl with his eyes, the Tsar thought that nobody could help her except of her real mother – the Spring.

When Kupava learned of the Tsar’s decision she got wild with grief, tore her pearl necklace, Mizghir’s gift, off her white neck, ripped her sarafan (a Russian dress), and wanted to throw herself in the deep of the well, but Lel saw her, calmed her and talked her out of her resolution.

Meanwhile, Spring had come. The sun rose higher and higher in the sky, the snow melted, the tender grass began to shoot, the birds sang and built their nests. But the more the sun warmed, the paler and sadder Snegurochka grew. One spring day young maidens and men strolled and danced in a ring with singing. Then when each youth should choose a maiden for him for dancing, Snegurochka was sure that he would choose her, but he went by and approached Kupava, inviting her for the dance.

Snegurochka was disappointed and felt upset; she rushed deeply to the forest and began to call her mother Spring begging her for help. “Mother Spring,” cried she, “What is love, that makes suffer even me, though I cannot love anybody! I want to have feelings like people, I want to love!”

Her mother, beautiful, bright and tall woman appeared and responded, “My poor child, you know that it is impossible, due to your father Frost. In my power I can grant you love only for one minute, but then you will die. So I cannot do this, I can’t kill you.”

“But mother,” begged Snegurochka, “The only wish of mine is to feel love. Let me die after it, because anyway I will die without love.” And Spring agreed through her heartache to fulfill her daughter’s desire.

“Farewell, my dear girl,” she said, then flourished her hands and disappeared.
Just that time Mizghir was sitting beneath a birch and crying about his unhappy love for Snegurochka. Suddenly he heard some noise and saw Snegurochka running headlong between green birches. He stood up, and seeing him, she flung herself into his arms. They kissed, Mizghir was happy and called Snegurochka to her adopted parents to ask their blessing for their marriage. But before he can say a word, she disappeared. Only a little puddle remained on the ground.

Love melted the cold Snow Maiden. A light mist rose up and vanished slowly in the blue sky.
An Interview with Eowyn Ivey

From foreverrewriting.blogspot.com

1. You found your agent in an unusual way. Please share!

I was attending the Kachemak Bay Writers’ Conference in Homer several years ago. I know a lot of writers go to conferences hoping to pitch to an editor or an agent, but that wasn’t my goal. I went to learn more about the craft and meet other writers. I was there with my mom, Julie LeMay, who is a poet. Jeff Kleinman from Folio Literary Management was the presenting literary agent, and I was impressed with the titles he represented. But my novel wasn’t finished, and I wouldn’t have signed up to speak with him if my mom hadn’t kept prodding me. What did I have to lose? At least I could get a feel for how the novel might be received if and when I was ready to query agents. I described my concept to Jeff, and he asked to read the first 100 pages. Since I wasn’t there to pitch, I hadn’t even brought my manuscript! Thankfully, I was able to get the pages to him; he read them there at the conference and offered to represent it.

2. From your blurb, The Snow Child appears to have elements of a re-telling, magical realism and historical. What's its genre and how did it get classified?

It’s general fiction. Although it has a fantastical element and is set in the past, it isn’t a genre novel. You’ll see it described as “literary fiction” by some bookstores and websites, but it’s a label I’m uncomfortable using myself because it seems to be a value claim. “Literary” to me is something that has stood the test of time. But The Snow Child would be shelved in the fiction section of a bookstore or library.

3. You did research prior to writing this book. Talk about how important the research was to your plotting.

The research provided more inspiration than facts. I was working a shift at Fireside Books when I stumbled on a children’s picture book called The Snow Child, illustrated by Alaskan artist Barbara Lavallee. That’s when I first learned of the Snegurochka fairy tale. Right then I knew this was the storyline I had been looking for. As I began writing the novel, I continued to learn more about the fairy tale. I discovered that over the centuries it has been retold in many versions and media—Russian lacquer paintings, Arthur Ransome’s translations. There’s even an opera and a ballet based on the fairy tale. All of this fueled my imagination.

Fireside Books is our local bookstore. I spend a regular chunk of Christmas dough there each year. So do my kids.

4. How important are beta writers or critique partners to you?
My family is my primary source of writing support. As I wrote each night, I would come downstairs and read sections aloud to my husband and older daughter. At the same time, my mom and I had an ongoing arrangement – each week she would give me a poem and I would give her a chapter. The rule was that, because these were first drafts, we could only say what we liked about them. It was really about having a deadline and encouraging each other. I was also fortunate to have other people who were willing to read finished drafts of it, including my dad, fellow authors and booksellers, and former coworkers from the newspaper business.

5. What authors inspire you with their style? Or, if you had to compare your book to others out there, what are they?

I could write pages and pages about the authors who have inspired me. My writing was born out of my love of reading. When I was a little girl, I devoured books such as *Little House in the Big Woods*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and *The Boxcar Children*. As a teenager I read everything from David Eddings to Lois Lowry to Stephen King. It was in college and later that I discovered authors such as Louise Erdrich, Larry McMurtry, Annie Dillard, Cormac McCarthy, Annie Proulx, and Charles Frazier. I am a member of a book club, and we’ve read a lot of classics over the years -- *Frankenstein*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Middlemarch*, *Crime and Punishment*. I read Austen, Nabokov, Hemingway, Melville, Joyce, Chekov, Woolf. I also read a lot of modern fiction such as *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *Tinkers*, *Everything is Illuminated*, *The Green Age of Asher Witherow*, *The Ice-Shirt*. As a bookseller, I’m in constant contact with the fabulous new books hitting the shelves. I just finished *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children*, *The Detour*, and *The Marriage Plot*. Now I’m reading *Pure* by Julianna Baggott. As you can see my taste runs from westerns to fantasy, literary fiction to classics. And I would love to think that what I read influences my own writing.

6. What was going out on sub like? How did you fill the waiting?

It is a torturous process, especially having worked in journalism for nearly a decade. I was used to a fast turn over, same-day praise or rejection. In book publishing we’re talking months or even years. But I tried to put that nervous energy to good use. I wrote short stories, I began working on the next novel, and I read a lot.

7. Now that TSC has been on shelves in other countries and is doing well, talk about your expectations for the US debut. What advice have any publishing experts given you?

I don’t think anyone can give me advice on this one. The truth is no one – not the editor, the agent, the publisher, the bookseller, and certainly not the author – can predict how a book is going to do. We all just follow our guts, write and read what we love, and it can be surprising which books hit the bestseller list and which ones never see the light of day. I’m not talking about quality as much as theme and subject and approach. I believe a lot of different factors in society influence what books become well-loved at a certain time. So instead of trying to play that impossible guessing game, I’m just grateful for each email or tweet I get from a reader in Oslo or London or Orlando who has enjoyed it.
When I say ‘doing well’ I really mean it’s a bestseller. Like, in Norway. And possibly in other countries by now.

8. You landed a grant to help fund research for your next novel. Talk about that process, including any tips for grant writing or research you may have learned.

It’s true what they say – try, try again. I’ve applied for grants before and not received them. I think a few things helped me this time with the Rasmuson Foundation. I had a very concrete project that would clearly help me write my next novel. I had a polished excerpt from the novel in progress. I had improved my resume with short story publications and the acquisition of my novel by Little, Brown & Co. And I had attended a fabulous session at Association of Writers & Writing Programs conference in Denver that was all about how to write a grant proposal. I highly recommend to anyone who wants to write and publish and apply for grants to attend conferences like these. You can get a tremendous amount of helpful information!

9. Your debut is coming right up. How will you balance publicity for this book with writing on your next?

We’re planning a book release part in conjunction with Fireside Books at the Inn Café in Palmer that evening. As for balancing everything, my goal is to enjoy the incredible ride. I write because I love to, and I always find the time when I set my mind to it. I’ve been pleasantly surprised to find The Snow Child opening new doors for me to publish essays and short stories. But however much writing I do, or don’t do, I know that publicity opportunities for The Snow Child are once-in-a-lifetime -- never again will I have a debut novel.

10. I’ve heard it said that landing the second contract can be harder than the first. What’s your opinion on that?

I have no idea. I guess when I finish my next novel, I’ll find out.

Well, dang. I was hoping you’d dispel that as an urban (or literary) legend. Sometimes the literary life seems like a climb up Lazy Mountain - just when you think you’ve hit the summit, you see another peak to climb...and then another...and another.....