

1. There is a telling passage about Dr. Coppola's transformation at the start of the book when he shaves his head: "I feel a lot of things—loneliness, fear, concern for my family back in Texas. As the last vestiges of my stateside life pile in black-gray clumps on the wet earth, I take a full breath. No longer is there any doubt my part in this war is real" (page 12). Is Dr. Coppola someone who is ripe for such a transformation? Does he actively seek it out? Has anything similar happened in your own life?

2. In some ways, Dr. Coppola is portrayed as a classically heroic character; called to action, he must leave his home and overcome a series of difficult trials before finding redemption. Talk about how well Dr. Coppola matches your notion of the American hero—how do his habits, his interactions with people, the way he acts in traumatic situations, fit into or defy this notion. Is Dr. Coppola someone you'd like to get to know, work with, or have as a neighbor or a friend?

3. At the heart of the book lies a fundamental conflict between Dr. Coppola's duty as a healer, and his participation in a war he finds responsible for unnecessary deaths. Do you think this conflict is ever fully resolved in his mind? Does Dr. Coppola ever articulate a clear role for himself in Iraq?