

Lies of Omission: A Hanneke Bauer Mystery
By Kathleen Ernst

Discussion Guide

1. Hanneke needed to take action after arriving in Milwaukee and finding herself unmet. What would you have done in her situation? Would you have accepted Regina's offer of help instead of striking out alone?
2. One of the novel's main themes involves the rise of the Know-Nothing movement. As Fridolin wrote in a letter, *Although a certain anti-foreigner spirit has simmered in some quarters here for years, I am afraid it may come to a full boil in Wisconsin this year*. How do the nativist sentiments of 1855 depicted in the novel compare with modern immigration issues?
3. Hanneke's relationship with Deputy John Barlow starts poorly and remains troubled. What would you have done in his place when confronted by Hanneke's unexpected appearance and story? Is his impatience understandable?
4. Angela is an unwed mother-to-be trying running a tavern, and has no wish for additional troubles. What did you think of her, and of her evolving relationship with Hanneke?
5. Black kitchens were necessary in Old World regions where timber was scarce, but also dangerous and unhealthy. A handful of black kitchens were built by early Pomeranians settling in Wisconsin, despite deep forests in the vicinity. Why do you think some of the earliest immigrants made that choice?
6. Hanneke chose to enter Christine's home while she was away. Considering the circumstances, was Hanneke's action reasonable? How far would you have been willing to go to learn the truth about Fridolin's death?
7. Clara Steckelberg's character is based on an anecdote about a woman who slipped from her home at night to repair farm work done poorly by her Latin Farmer husband. What did you think of Clara?
8. Instead of romance or passion, Hanneke's brief relationship with Fridolin was based on mutual admiration, shared interests, and the ability to converse comfortably. If he had lived, do you think their marriage would have been successful?
9. Any historical novelist faces the challenge of creating a protagonist that is true to her time, yet still appealing to modern readers. Do you feel that Hanneke was a well-balanced character? Why, or why not?

10. Historians have documented about one hundred fugitives who passed through Wisconsin while traveling toward freedom. Since those involved rarely spoke of their experiences, even after emancipation, the true number will never be known. Fridolin's commitment to the Underground Railroad cost him—and Hanneke—dearly. By the end of the book, how did you feel about Fridolin and the choices he made?

If you are hosting a discussion of Lies of Omission, consider making a delicious story-themed treat like kuchen or sour cream apple pie! Kathleen has written blog posts about both, with recipes included.

<https://sitesandstories.wordpress.com/2022/04/12/kuchen-2/>

<https://sitesandstories.wordpress.com/2010/01/14/immigrant-apples/>