

The Solace of Stars: A Hanneke Bauer Mystery
By Kathleen Ernst

Discussion Guide

1. This book introduces William Bluewing, a young Ho-Chunk man, and his family. Was it surprising to read that early Pomeranians generally got along well with their Native American neighbors? The forced removals referenced in the book continued.ⁱ Some people were forced into train boxcars at gunpoint for transport, and many died. What do you imagine the future might hold for William and Jacobine? Do you think Jacobine would have made the same choice if she could have foreseen the brutal future of Indian policies?
2. Carl Schurz said, both in history and in the mystery, “Ideals are like stars. We never reach them, but like mariners of the sea, we chart our course by them.” Do you agree with that sentiment?
3. Karoline chose to remain with August despite his growing problems with alcohol after his injury, although she did make plans to send Jacobine to safety. What would you have done in Karoline’s situation?
4. Hanneke is uncomfortable when Deputy Barlow asks her to listen for any helpful tidbit of conversation, and report it back to him. How would you feel in such a situation? Was it fair of him to ask?
5. Although generally a sensible woman, Hanneke miscalculated when she decided to explore Caspar Wulff’s shop. Why do you think she made the decision she did? Did her reactions after escaping seem plausible? What would you have done?
6. In her role as Jacobine’s guardian, Hanneke sometimes struggled. Do you think she reacted well when she learned the girl was keeping secrets? Hanneke also told Gottlieb, “If I ever discovered someone taking advantage of Jacobine in any way, I would be *sorely* unhappy.” Was it appropriate for Hanneke to speak as she did?
7. The depiction of the Steckelbergs’ *Erntedankfest* is an example of how immigrants transported festivals and traditions to the New World. What similar examples were once common in your family or community? Are they still celebrated? If so, how have they evolved over time?
8. At one point in the story, Hanneke realizes she told a lie of omission: *She shook her head at the irony. Moments like this provided reluctant insight into Fridolin’s dilemma when he’d chosen to keep secrets from her. Sometimes, the fear of hurting a loved one overpowered logic.*

The Ketzlers kept secrets, which distressed Hanneke; Hanneke chooses to withhold things she knows about Jacobine and Karoline from John Barlow. Did they make good choices? If you've also read *Lies of Omission*, how did Hanneke's evasions compare with Fridolin's?

9. Were you surprised when the killer was revealed? Do you think it likely that deep personal trauma and fear could provoke the actions taken by Hans and Elizabeth Goetsch?

10. Emotionally, Hanneke is in a different place at the beginning of the story than she is at the end. How did you feel about her journey? What did she discover along the way? Where would you like to see her go from here?

*If you are hosting a discussion of *The Solace of Stars*, 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/>