

## Threadbare Readers' Guide

*Threadbare* is a collection of non-fiction essays that prompts important questions about how to overcome challenges faced by Alaskan communities. Reflecting on life in the apartment complex, the Season of Giving charity luncheon, the Salvation Army, Wellness Court, Hiland Mountain Correctional Facility, and the university, Kudenov explores the larger community of Anchorage and potential sources of its resilience.

Questions by essay:

### “Mercy”

The three stories in this chapter are about mercy. Can you think of a time you had mercy on someone or something? Can you think of a time someone was merciful to you?

Is mercifulness an important quality for human beings to possess? Is it important for maintaining healthy communities?

What do you think each of the stories suggest about mercy? How can our impulse to be merciful sometimes cause more harm than good?

### “A History of Smoking”

The author describes the difficulty of learning to ride a bike on her own. How might this description illustrate personal resilience and the resilience of the characters and communities she describes in the book?

After witnessing a dog being hit by a police car, the author at the same time empathizes with the police officer and imagines that the tragic event didn't happen. She later explains that she had learned to split her personality, to be “the girl who smoked in the woods wistful for a father” and “the girl who taught herself to stay upright and didn't give a damn.” How can compartmentalizing our feelings (and “not giving a damn”) help us to survive difficulties? How can it poses problems for a person's or a community's well being?

What do you think smoking meant to the author; what does it represent in the story? How is it associated with her desire to know her father? Why does she decide to give it up?

What impressions does the author give of East Anchorage as a community? The story is focused on the author's experiences but how do we also learn of life in East Anchorage and the challenges of those who live there?

What role did people like Lou and Cowboy have in the author's life? Have you known people like Lou and Cowboy?

### “Notes from Baltic Avenue”

Consider the following quotation: “I lay in bed wondering how many fences kept me and the people in my building in low-rent neighborhoods. There were so many unfulfilled needs for good parents, education, treatment programs, decent wages. When the community task forces ‘cleaned up’ neighborhoods like Mountainview, they failed to address what made them dangerous in the first place” (Kudenov, 36). What are some of the ‘fences’ that keep individuals in neighborhoods they might prefer to leave?

What does the author suggest about poverty in her community and the many non-profit organizations that exist to alleviate it?

What is ironic about the Season of Giving charity?

What could have been done to help someone like Rae?

What were some of the greatest difficulties for the author as she lived on Taku Drive?

### “Open Holds”

In “Open Holds” the author helps a young boy find his way home. How does her story of wandering alone as a child in Haines resemble the story she tells about Christopher?

Why is family important to communities?

How can family dysfunction threaten a community, especially its most vulnerable members?

Can you relate to the author and Christopher in your experience growing up?

The author expresses hope that Christopher would grow up and succeed in life. What does she think this? What personal qualities are necessary for overcoming the obstacles Christopher may face?

In the stories, both the author and the woman who baked the author a cake share a similar role. Describe this role. How do such people help to make a community resilient?

### “A Man of Fashion”

What does Mark’s clothing tell us about him and the communities he belongs to? How is clothing important for indicating which communities we identify with?

Josie seems preoccupied with the way those working for her are dressed. Should appearances matter?

What does the author mean when she says, "Whole countries make their way on and off that wagon, one citizen at a time" (55).

What is the relationship between homelessness and alcoholism in Alaska? How do these problems reflect deeper contributing problems in our communities?  
Is Mark's stubbornness a strength or a weakness?

What sort of community does Mark need to succeed? If people like Mark don't find a supportive community to facilitate change what is the impact on the community-at-large?

How do addictions harm communities and not just the addict?

What can communities do to effectively address the threat of addiction?

"When class-passing, you no longer belong where you came from or fit in where you are. It's an essential loneliness" (59). What does the author mean by "class-passing"? How do class differences manifest themselves? Does recovery from addiction or getting an education often require class-passing? Do you ever feel like you are trying to "pass" in a group?

When Mark graduates from the Wellness Court program he leaves behind a community of which he was a popular member. What are some of the norms and assumptions of that community? Why does the change of environment or community often make it hard for a person to stay sober or maintain valued commitments?

Should the author be hopeful Mark will do well after graduating? What does Mark need to continue to make progress? Who is impacted if Mark doesn't maintain his sobriety?

"The Real Women of Hiland Mountain"

Why do we have prisons? What are some of the reasons discussed by the author?

How does the author describe the community at Hiland Mountain Correctional Facility?

At one point, the author refers to Diana (Waggy) as "a normal woman who had a really bad day" (87). What are conflicting ways that she and other prisoners are portrayed in the chapter or in popular culture.

Can someone like Diana (Waggy) really change? How?

The author discusses how a sense of victimization can be an impediment to growth as an individual. Can victimization be an impediment to growth for a community that has been traumatized or is under threat?

“The Origin of Light”

In the “Origin of Light” the author retells different myths. How do stories like these help communities cope with devastating loss?

The author explores the relationship between light and dark and suggests that light can come out of the dark. How can good come from our darkest moments as individuals or as a community?

Does the darkness of Alaska winter pose a threat to communities? How can communities in Alaska remain resilient under this threat?

How does suicide harm a community?

Why do you think Seth’s suicide was Mary’s ‘before-and-after point’? ( ) What did she mean? Can you relate to her experience?

“Threadbare”

What does the Thread of Destiny proverb suggest about human relationships?

The author describes her interactions with a future murderer and a future rapist. What about her description of Erin and Theo surprise you?

How do horrific evils like those perpetrated by Erin and Theo affect communities?

What do communities come to grips with such evils?

The author contrasts Brian’s path with Erin and Theo’s. Why might Brian avoid the path of his friends?

The author considers various sorts of answers (theological, psychological, environmental, *etc.*) to the question why these evils occurred. Is it important as a community to search for such answers?

“Trout, Mostly”

In “Trout, Mostly” the author worries that she has forgotten things. What sorts of things are they?

How does the author contrast life in an urban and in a rural environment? What are some of the challenges associated with each?

Cities around the world have growing populations of people who have left a rural environment to seek opportunities. What challenges do such individuals face? How does the integration of those from a rural background pose challenges for cities?

What skills or knowledge is clearly valuable in a rural or urban context that may not be so clearly useful in the other? Is it important for communities to find a way to integrate these skills and types of knowledge?

Do you detect a tension between the norms governing urban life and rural life in Anchorage? Are there perceived problems that the city faces (e.g., people camping in the wooded areas) that may have to do with differences in the norms governing urban and rural life? If so, how should such conflicts be resolved by the Anchorage community?