

1. In the prologue of the book, Désirée wonders if she could have “prevented it all, thwarted the insatiable beast that would consume everything in its wake—his crown, his empire, his continent, his life?” How do you think history would have been different if Napoleon had married Désirée instead of Josephine?

2. What was your first impression of Désirée Clary? How did that impression change throughout the course of the novel? How did Désirée change? When courting her, Napoléon tells Desire that he needs her because she’s earnest and pure. In what ways does she remain so and in what ways does she not?

3. Despite being replaced by her as Napoleon’s wife, Désirée ultimately befriends Josephine and feels genuine affection for her. Discuss the complicated nature of their relationship.

4. Early in the novel, Napoleon asks Désirée’s mother if she agrees with the infamous Renaissance writer and politician Machiavelli’s opinion that the ends justify the means, no matter how immoral the means might be. Why do you think Napoleon asks that question? How do you think he would answer it—and how would that answer be reflected in his behavior as the first emperor of France?

5. Upon meeting Désirée, Josephine commented that Napoleon had a tendency to remake people in the image of his own mind. How do each of these women withstand the tendency to conform? How do they not?

6. What would you have done if you had been in Désirée’s position in *The Queen’s Fortune*? Would you have made the same choices she did? Do you think she was dealt a difficult hand in life? How would you feel if you were thrust into her place?

7. Discuss the three marital prospects of Désirée’s life: Napoleon Bonaparte, Leonard Duphot, and Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte. How do they each treat her differently? How does Désirée behave differently with each of them?

8. Discuss the various roles women occupy in this book. How are they used to serve men’s purposes? How do they assert independence and influence for themselves?

9. What was your favorite part of the book: the time period, the characters, the setting, the plot? Did you learn something new or surprising about this major moment in history?

10. Désirée has many facets to her identity; she is, at various times, defined as a daughter, a wife, a mother, a sister, a Frenchwoman, an expatriate, a queen—just to name a few. Discuss how these various labels shift and evolve, which of these are most indelible to her character and sense of self?

