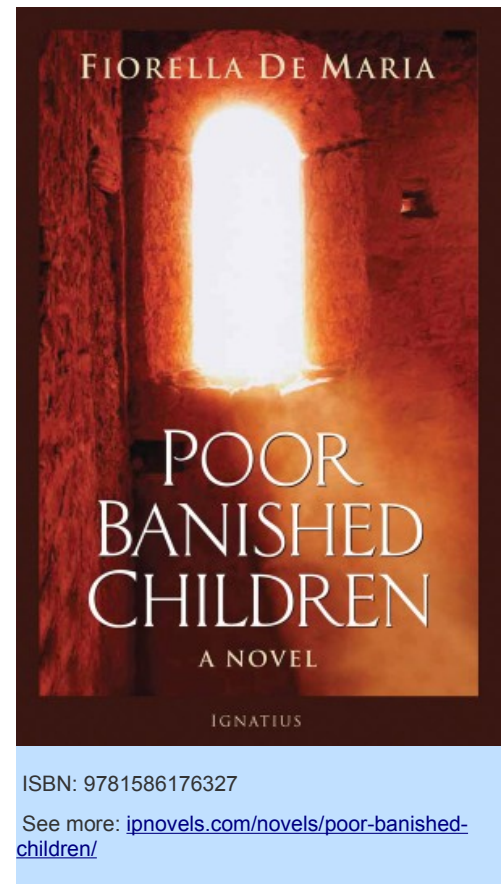


Discussion Questions for *Poor Banished Children*

1. Ursula, Warda, Perpetua, Pietro. Why does the heroine's name keep changing throughout the novel and to what extent is this representative of her shifting identity? How significant are her names?
2. 'Tom could have been convinced that she was not a human being at all. A nymph of the sea perhaps or some other fantastical creature, she was so wild and so perfectly made – except that she was wounded and only a real woman could bruise and bleed as she had done.' How, and at what points in the novel is female vulnerability explored? Is Warda an entirely 'vulnerable' character?
3. 'I wish I were a man; it would be much simpler'. How do Warda's struggles with her female identity manifest themselves through the events of the novel? To what extent – if at all – does Warda's sexual ambivalence offer a social comment on the position of women?
4. Early in the novel, Fr Antonin gives Warda a knife. What does it symbolise? How does Warda 'misuse' the gifts Fr Antonin gives her?
5. Fr Dan and Ibrahim Reis both rescue Warda at different stages in the novel and offer her a certain kind of freedom. What are their motives? What is the significance of their backgrounds being so similar?
6. Dreams and confession play an important role in *Poor Banished Children*. Why do they feature so strongly in the novel and what effect do they have on the tone and development of the story?
7. Imprisonment has many manifestations in the novel. Discuss the different ways in which Warda is 'imprisoned' during the course of the novel, both literally and figuratively.
8. What is the role of the physician/healer in the novel?
9. The story is told from multiple perspectives including; Warda, Fr Antonin, Omar, Ibrahim Reis and Hala. What are the advantages and disadvantages of multiple perspective in storytelling? What, if anything, do the different voices of the novel add to the story?
10. When Warda puts her own life in danger trying to save a seriously injured mariner, she recalls: "...having bled two men to death I thought that God must be giving me the chance to atone by saving this man's life and I knew I could not fail." Warda appears to be driven at times by guilt and the desire to atone for her sins. How far is her search for freedom connected with her search for redemption?



11. There are many examples of Catholic imagery and metaphor in the story: Fr Dan's Christ-like sacrifice, Omar's sweetmeats, Fr Branton's crucifix. How central is Catholicism to the story? Can *Poor Banished Children* be described as a 'Catholic' novel?
12. Early in the novel, Fr Antonin warns Warda: "just show a little humility. If you know your weaknesses you will not be enslaved by them." Is it fair to say that Warda as a character is 'enslaved' by her weaknesses?
13. When Warda's life hangs in the balance, she makes the observation: 'Death makes villains of us all'. How far is fear the motivating factor in the many acts of treachery and betrayal in the book?
14. Warda is tormented by a recurring dream that a baby she is carrying is violently torn from her arms. "I can hear her crying for me from some undefined point far away but I am beaten back at every turn and plead for her. Her cries become weaker and I can hear her frail life trickling away because she has been taken from her nurturer... but I cannot reach her. The claws that snatched her from my body hold me down and I will never have the strength to free myself." What is the significance of this dream?
15. Warda is repeatedly seen deliberately defying authority figures who stand in her way. Is authority ever portrayed positively in the book? Is it true to say that Warda is conditioned to reject authority long before she is captured?
16. Shortly before the conclusion of the novel, Ibrahim Reis makes a pass at Warda and she observes: "We all desire to be loved... Even this feared, hated creature desires the embrace of a woman who loves him." How is loneliness and the search for love represented in the novel?
17. Fr Dan muses upon Warda's 'audacity and courage' during her failed escape attempt. To what extent is Warda redeemed by her courage?