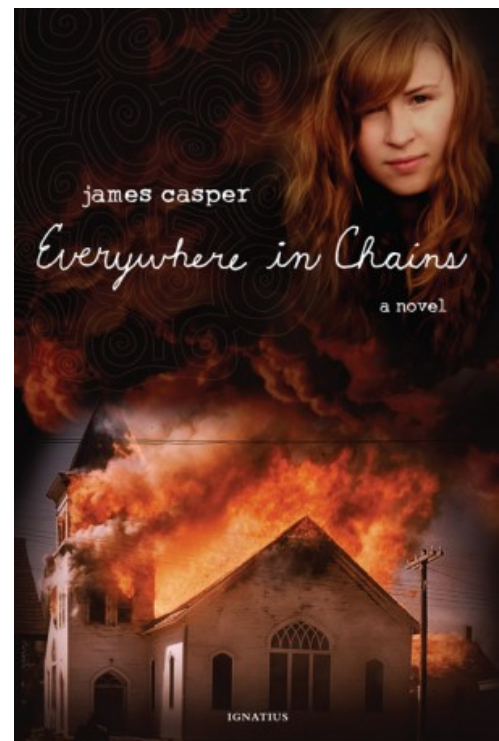


## Discussion Questions for *Everywhere in Chains*

### Part One – Step-by-step as the novel is read by book club members:

1. What mood is established by the description of Lake Superior at the beginning of the first chapter?
2. Discuss how other first and second chapter details set up both a sense of mystery and a sense of a new beginning.
3. What important role does Penelope's stepfather Marvin play in the increasingly tense relationship between Penelope and her mother?
4. Why is it important to the novel's plot development that Penelope and her aunt Charlotte have the same orange-red hair?
5. What hints are provided early on suggesting that Penelope might be in for a surprise when she meets Felix?
6. When Penelope learns the truth about her pen pal, what does her reaction reveal about her character?
7. What does Marvin's reaction to all this—including his mistake in driving past the prison—say about his feelings toward his stepdaughter?
8. What role does Esther Corrigan's expertise as a clinical psychologist, mental health treatment advocate, and prison reformer have in the unfolding story?
9. In what ways do subsequent events reveal the truth of Ralph Corrigan's observation that the unforeseen has a way of happening?
10. Do Ralph Corrigan's nostalgia, Felix' love for Uncle Milton and his farm, and Marvin's antique car collection have anything in common and any overall significance as details in the story?
11. When you have come this far, discuss possible suggestions and nuances associated with the author's choice of names for both places and certain characters: Star Island, Bell Harbor, Clay Corners, Shade Creek, Pine Shadows, Sisters Hilaria and Serena, Lawyer Crossman, Felix, and of course Penelope herself.
12. How has the presence of Shade Creek, a super-max prison, forever changed the character of Clay Corners and its surrounding countryside, and what is the author suggesting by describing this?
13. What does Father Ulrich imply when he suggests churches need a good fire now and then, and when he points out that the dove and the flame are both symbols for the Holy Spirit?
14. Discuss Father Ulrich's role as a parish priest in Penelope's divided family and Bell Harbor's divided community.
15. Father Ulrich sees himself, and is often seen by others, as an old-fashioned parish priest. Nevertheless, in certain respects, he is also a rebel. Find examples to support one or both views of him.



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**Part Two – Final considerations after the novel has been read:**

16. What is the role of humor in this novel, not just with Fred of Ed's, but elsewhere at unexpected moments involving other characters?
17. Discuss: Bell Harbor characters are Catholic for the most part. Clay Corners characters might be village atheists for all we know, and yet characters in both settings adhere to core Christian values in their efforts to help Penelope.
18. Discuss the roll and importance of seemingly minor characters: Larry, the bus driver; Fred of Ed's; Sisters Serena and Hilaria; Matt, a former garage mechanic and now a Shade Creek employee; Felix' Uncle Milton; Father Ulrich's chaplain uncle.
19. Is June a good character, a bad character, or a deeply-troubled and conflicted character?
20. What elements of both personality and personal history do Felix and Penelope have in common that unite them despite the vast difference in their ages?
21. Now that you know the whole story, select and discuss the possible significance of its early details, for example the broken weather vane, the mouse in the wall, etc.
22. At several points in the story, including the very end, Penelope says, "It's okay; it's really okay." What does this say about her?
23. Is it believable, in view of the truth she now knows, that she would nonetheless join a religious community?
24. At what point did you as a reader first suspect a connection between the St. John Vianney Church fire and Warren Hall's childhood experiences years before?
25. Is Warren Hall a Christ-figure, and if so what is deeply ironic about this, and how is it a possible commentary on present day Catholic Church problems?
26. What is the author attempting to highlight by establishing *victims of punishment* as a counterpoint for *victims of crime*?