



Davita's Harp

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHAIM POTOK was born and raised in New York City. He began to write fiction at the age of sixteen, was graduated with a B.A. *summa cum laude* in English literature, and earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania. An ordained rabbi, he served as an army chaplain in Korea for sixteen months, with, successively, a front-line medical battalion and an engineer combat battalion. He is the author of nine other novels including *The Chosen*, *My Name is Asher Lev*, and *The Promise*. He died in 2002 at age 73. *Davita's Harp* is the only one of Potok's full-length novels to feature a female protagonist.

OTHER NOVELS BY AUTHOR CHAIM POTOK

- The Chosen
- The Promise
- My Name is Asher Lev
- In the Beginning
- The Book of Lights
- Davita's Harp
- The Gift of Asher Lev
- I Am the Clay
- Old Men at Midnight

GUIDE TO THE CHARACTERS

Ilana Davita: The narrator of the novel, which tracks her growth from young child through middle school.

Michael Chandel: Ilana Davita's father, a journalist, atheist and communist

Annie (Channah) Chandel: Ilana Davita's mother, a Polish immigrant, social worker, atheist & communist

Jakob Daw: A mystical storytelling friend of Annie's from her university days in Vienna

Sarah Chandel: Michael's sister, a missionary nurse

Ezra Dinn: Annie's Orthodox cousin, an immigration lawyer

David Dinn: Ezra's son

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FRAMED BY GLORIA BORG OLDS

1. The role of belief systems in the novel – communism, Judaism, Christianity – is prominent. Is each presented as equal, respectfully, and as an equally satisfying choice?
2. Potok's feminism: both mother and daughter are strong, appealing, charismatic figures, but both are at times seriously mentally fragile. Is there any contradiction? How do gender roles and expectations affect each?
3. What age is the narrator? Is this clear throughout the book?
4. Consider Annie's character: is her attraction to three quite different men understandable? How is her deep need for a system of belief explored? Is the second marriage and concomitant change of practice believable?
5. What is the function of Davita's harp in the novel?
6. What is the place of story-telling in the novel? How does it function for the narrator? For Jacob, the author of the tales? How do music and birds function within the tales and the novel?
7. Loss in the novel is a major factor personally and historically. How do the characters handle loss?
8. Parenting in the novel: is there a balance between family and profession?
9. What part does "getting out of the city" play in the novel?
10. How is mental illness/breakdown handled by the author?
11. How is the significance of journalism in this society explored?
12. Is the historical setting of the period a backdrop for the story or vice versa? Is it Integral?
13. Resilience. Disillusion. Courage. How do these characteristics play out in various individuals?

For information about the Jewish Radicals, Wobblies in Centralia, WA, the Spanish Civil War and the Lincoln Brigade, visit the "**For Further Investigation**" page on our website: <http://jewishtheatrecolaborative.org/davita-investigation.html>