

## Book Club Discussion Guide



*Unearthing by Kyo Maclear, Page 1 (June 2024)*

# Unearthing : a story of tangled love and family secrets

By Kyo Maclear

## About the author:

Kyo Maclear is an essayist, editor, novelist and children's author. Her books have been translated into eighteen languages, published in over twenty-five countries, and garnered nominations from the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction, the Governor General's Literary Awards, the TD Canadian Children's Literature Awards, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards, the Amazon.ca First Novel Award, and the National Magazine Awards. Her nonfiction books include the hybrid memoir *Birds Art Life* (2017), a finalist for the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction and winner of the Trillium Book Award, and *Unearthing: A Story of Tangled Love and Family Secrets* (2023), winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Nonfiction.

Her work has appeared in *Orion Magazine*, *Brick*, *Border Crossings*, *The Millions*, *LitHub*, *The Volta*, *Prefix Photo*, *Resilience*, *The Guardian*, *Lion's Roar*, *Azure*, *The Globe and Mail*, and elsewhere. She has been a national arts reviewer for *Canadian Art* and a monthly arts columnist for *Toronto Life*.

She holds a doctorate in Environmental Humanities and teaches writing at the University of Guelph Creative Writing MFA and Humber School for Writers. She is an editor-at-large with

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Tundra Books/Penguin Random House Canada and recipient of the 2023 Vicky Metcalf Award for Young People for her body of work.

Source: <https://www.kyomaclear.com/about/>

### About this book:

An unforgettable memoir about a family secret revealed by a DNA test, the lessons learned in its aftermath, and the indelible power of love—for readers of *Wintering* and *Crying in H Mart*.

The story of a long-held family secret, full of twists and turns, interwoven with a personal botanical history, *Unearthing* is a bold portrait of human relationships and a deeply thoughtful consideration of connection in our fragile and fractured world.

When a DNA test reveals that the father who raised her was not biologically related to her, Kyo Maclear becomes a detective in her own life, unravelling the mystery piece by piece in a search tied to the seasons, plant life, and the making of a garden.

Through its brief and beautifully composed chapters—each a portal—Maclear reflects on race and lineage, grief and loyalty, art and refuge, and the fierce and sometimes funny love between a mother and daughter, to tell a captivating and propulsive story of inheritance that goes beyond heredity.

What gets planted, and what gets buried? What role does storytelling play in unearthing the past and making sense of a life, particularly in the shadows of missed opportunities and failing memories? Can the act of tending a garden provide common ground, and even joy, for an inquisitive daughter and her reticent mother? As it seeks to answer these questions, *Unearthing* bursts with the very love it seeks to understand.

Source: <https://www.kyomaclear.com/books/unearthing/>

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### Discussion Questions:

(General nonfiction questions to get book club discussions off to a good start.)

1. If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c:
  - a. What observations are made in the book? Does the author examine economics and politics family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
  - b. Does the author criticize or admire the culture? Does he/she wish to preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained?
  - c. What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?
2. What is the central idea discussed in the book? What issues or ideas does the author explore? Are they personal, sociological, global, political, economic, spiritual, medical, or scientific?
3. Do the issues affect your life? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?
4. What evidence does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual-based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?

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5. What kind of language does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it biased, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?
6. What are the implications for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?
7. What solutions does the author propose? Are the author's recommendations concrete, sensible, doable? Who would implement those solutions?
8. How controversial are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?
9. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
10. What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?

Source: LitLovers (<http://www.litlovers.com>)