

Discussion Questions for Readers
Of *Mail-Order Kid* by Marilyn June Coffey

What is the significance of the title, *Mail-Order Kid*?

At the beginning of the book, the author uses an epigraph, or short quotation, by Eileen Simpson, who wrote, "Once an orphan, always an orphan." How does that quote relate to Teresa? In what way is she "always an orphan"?

Why does Teresa feel torn, at fourteen, between her old life in the Volga German village of Schoenchen and her new life working for the up-to-date Geist family in Salina, Kansas? How does this cause her to leave Salina with Bappa when he comes for her?

Teresa often describes herself as "among the lowest of the low." What does she mean?

How does "high culture" in Hays, Kansas, influence Teresa in positive and negative ways? Consider how she acquires "culture" as she works in homes and how she values it. Examine how—and why—women of "culture" sometimes denigrate her.

What makes Teresa feel so passionately about the importance of education?

Teresa moves to Denver to earn a master's degree and to put some distance between herself and her husband, Frenchy. She doesn't earn her degree and Frenchy comes to Denver to live with her, so she fails to meet either goal. In your opinion, does this make her move to Denver a failure for her? Why or why not?

Teresa, brought up a Catholic, wears a crucifix on a chain around her neck. However, when she discovers that she is Jewish, she puts on both her crucifix and her Star of David necklace. Do you believe it's possible to be both Catholic and Jewish? Why doesn't Teresa choose one faith?

Can you identify with Teresa's thoughts and actions throughout the book? Why or why not?

Was any section of *Mail-Order Kid* particularly striking to you? If so, which one and why?

Were your ideas about orphans or orphan train riders transformed or reinforced by *Mail-Order Kid*? Explain.

In what ways is *Mail-Order Kid* uplifting despite the sad situations in the story?

Rate *Mail-Order Kid* on a scale of 1 to 5.