1. Why do you think that John Williams’s *Stoner* was not initially successful upon its 1965 publication? By extension, why do you think that the work has been “rediscovered” by so many recent readers, decades after its first appearance?

2. How would you describe the style of *Stoner*? What are the defining qualities of Williams as a writer?

3. What kind of protagonist is William Stoner? Do you consider him a “hero” or “anti-hero”? What makes his quiet, understated persona so potentially riveting for the reader?

4. What do you make of *Stoner* as a “campus novel”? Have you read other books about academe, and if so, how does Williams’s version of university life relate to these works? Did the book help you discover something about the college world that you did not know before?

5. How does *Stoner* treat the subject of marriage? How does Williams structure a dialogue between “domestic” and “passionate” love?

6. What is the portrait of family life that emerges from the novel? Do you think Williams is trying to make a larger point about the relation between the individual and the family in the America of that time?

7. At one point in the novel we read:

   "The love of literature, of language, of the mystery of the mind and heart showing themselves in the minute, strange, and unexpected combinations of letters and words, in the blackest and coldest print—the love which he had hidden as if it were illicit and dangerous, he began to display, tentatively at first, and then boldly, and then proudly."

   What is the larger significance of this quote and the ideas it expresses? How does Stoner’s love for literature and language relate to his love for actual human beings? What do you think Williams is trying to communicate about this relation?

8. *Stoner* is a novel filled with disappointments of various kinds; but do you think the book also contains messages of hope? If so, how and why?

9. What does the novel reveal to us about the “unled life”—that is, the possible future that Stoner imagines for himself but is ultimately incapable of making into reality?

10. What element of *Stoner* did you find most relevant to our lives today? What keeps the novel “contemporary” and prevents it from feeling dated or remote?

*This document is for the exclusive use of the Virtual Book Club and may not be shared, cited, or otherwise disseminated.*