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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **Mrs. Quinn's Rise to Fame** by Olivia Ford

#### Summary

Nothing could be more out of character, but after fifty-nine years of marriage, as her husband Bernard's health declines, and her friends' lives become focused on their grandchildren—which Jenny never had—Jenny decides she wants a little something for herself. So she secretly applies to be a contestant on the prime-time TV show *Britain Bakes*.

Whisked into an unfamiliar world of cameras and timed challenges, Jenny delights in a new-found independence. But that independence, and the stress of the competition, starts to unearth memories buried decades ago. Chocolate teacakes remind her of a furtive errand involving a wedding ring; sugared doughnuts call up a stranger's kind act; a simple cottage loaf brings back the moment her life changed forever.

With her baking star rising, Jenny struggles to keep a lid on that first secret—a long-concealed deceit that threatens to shatter the very foundations of her marriage. It's the only time in six decades that she's kept something from Bernard. By putting herself in the limelight, has Jenny created a recipe for disaster?

#### Discussion Questions

1. Describe your experience reading the book. What elements made this book an enjoyable or unenjoyable read?
2. What do you think of the novel's ending? What is the effect of not depicting the reunion between Jenny and her son? How did it affect your overall reading experience?
3. Throughout the novel, Jenny uses her family's recipes to feel close to people she has lost. Share the family recipes that bring up important memories or feelings for you.
4. If you could be on any reality television show, which show would you choose? How do you think being cast on the show would affect your life?
5. Jenny and her husband Bernard spend time with people of all ages, including their niece Rose, their great-niece Poppy, and Jenny's fellow contestant Azeez. How have intergenerational relationships shaped your life?

6. Jenny does not face real criticism as a contestant on *Britain Bakes*, and the media treats her kindly when her secret is revealed. Do you believe a 77-year-old woman would be a success on a similar show in real life? Would the media treatment of her secret be respectful?
7. How does the novel depict the relationship between reality television and the real world? How does participating in the show affect Jenny's sense of herself and her place in the world?
8. How do the flashback scenes reflect the challenges facing women in the first half of the 20th century? How has the world changed since then?
9. How is the fictional show *Britain Bakes* related to the real-life show *Great British Bake-Off* or other reality television shows? Did the show ring true to you? What did it contribute to contemporary conversation about reality television?
10. How does the structure of the novel—alternating between flashbacks to Jenny's pregnancy and her present on *Britain Bakes*—add tension to the novel? How does it impact Jenny's characterization?
11. Discuss the characterization of Azeez and Sorcha, the two contestants who compete in the final with Jenny. How do they reflect common tropes in reality television?
12. How does the novel's setting in the United Kingdom impact the main characters and the plot? How might the novel be different if it were set in the United States or another country?
13. Discuss the use of Jenny's cookbook as a symbol of the connection between food and memory. How do these recipes connect Jenny to her past?
14. Imagine a cookbook based on recipes from your family's history. What recipes would you highlight? What story would the cookbook tell?

Summary from Goodreads.com  
Discussion Questions from SuperSummary.com