In October 1972, a plane carrying an Uruguayan rugby team crashed in the Andes. Not immediately rescued, the survivors turned to cannibalism to survive and after 72 days were saved. Rugby team member Parrado has written a beautiful story of friendship, tragedy and perseverance. High in the Andes, with a fractured skull, eating the flesh of his teammates and friends, Parrado calmly ponders the cruelties of fate, the power of the natural world and the possibility of continued existence. "I would live from moment to moment and from breath to breath, until I had used up all the life I had." Parrado, who for the past 10 years has been giving inspirational talks based on his experiences, lost his mother and sister in the crash. Struggling to stay alive, his guide becomes his beloved father: "each [stride] brought me closer to my father... each step I took was a step stolen back from death." More than a companion to the 1970s bestselling chronicle of the disaster, Alive, this is a fresh, gripping page-turner that will satisfy adventure readers, and a complex reflection on camaraderie, family and love.
Fernando "Nando" Seler Parrado Dolgay (born December 9, 1949) is one of the sixteen Uruguayan survivors of Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571, which crashed in the Andes mountains on October 13, 1972. After spending two months trapped in the mountains with the other crash survivors, he, along with Roberto Canessa, climbed through the Andes mountains over a 10 day period to find help. His efforts, supported in various ways by the entire group, have been recognized through books and other media. He was portrayed by Ethan Hawke in the 1993 feature film Alive: Miracle in The Andes.
Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the various ways the survivors initially cope with their ordeal. In what ways do their life experiences (playing rugby, for example) provide them with strength?

2. Some of the survivors emerge as natural leaders and caretakers. In what ways do they care for those who are more weak, injured, or fearful? What do you think these examples tell us about human nature?

3. After the plane crash, many of the survivors question their faith in God. At the beginning of the ordeal, Parrado asks, “Why would [God] let my mother and sister die so senselessly? If he loves us so much, why does He leave us here to suffer?” In what ways does Parrado’s faith evolve over the course of the book? What answers does he find to his questions about God and faith?

4. There are endless examples of bravery throughout Miracle in the Andes. On page 87, Parrado details some examples of the courage he witnessed while on the mountain. Re-read this page where he explains the “many forms of bravery” that he saw. How do these examples differ from more traditional notions of bravery? What other examples of bravery resonated with you throughout the book?

5. The author often notes that cleverness and ingenuity were imperative in keeping the survivors alive in the mountains. Provide some examples when quick thinking and resourcefulness helped alleviate their suffering and/or aid in their survival.

6. The author notes at the end of the book that the media had unfairly sensationalized the fact that the survivors had to eat the dead in order to survive. As a result, the so-called “cannibalism” is the only part of this incredible story that many people remember. Parrado’s account of the story deals honestly with this issue. He explains clearly their initial ethical dilemma, as well as their subsequent acceptance of their only means of survival. Explain how the survivors reconcile their decision to eat the meat afforded by the dead. Was this a difficult decision? Where did they draw the line? How did you feel about this aspect of the book?

7. What did you think about the photos included in the book? In what ways did they influence your understanding of the story?

8. When Nando and Roberto decide to climb out of the mountains on foot, Nando worries that he is too confused and frightened to be trusted as a leader. He worries that he is giving the other men false hope, but ultimately he concludes
that “false hope was better than no hope at all” (125). Do you agree? Why or why not?

9. How does Parrado find the strength to continue his trek across the mountains towards civilization?

10. Describe Parrado’s homecoming. What obstacles does he face in the first weeks and months of his arrival home? (pp. 246-251)

11. Be sure to read the Epilogue. Why did Parrado decide to write this memoir thirty years after his experience? How did his ordeal ultimately shape his life?

12. Did you enjoy the book? Would you recommend the book to others? Why or why not?