The last words of this haunting novel resonate like a pealing bell. "He fell in love. It was his life." This is the unofficial obituary of octogenarian Leo Gursky, a character whose mordant wit, gallows humor and searching heart create an unforgettable portrait. Born in Poland and a WWII refugee in New York, Leo has become invisible to the world. When he leaves his tiny apartment, he deliberately draws attention to himself to be sure he exists. What's really missing in his life is the woman he has always loved, the son who doesn't know that Leo is his father, and his lost novel, called *The History of Love*, which, unbeknownst to Leo, was published years ago in Chile under a different man's name. Another family in New York has also been truncated by loss. Teenager Alma Singer, who was named after the heroine of *The History of Love*, is trying to ease the loneliness of her widowed mother, Charlotte. When a stranger asks Charlotte to translate *The History of Love* from Spanish for an exorbitant sum, the mysteries deepen. Krauss (*Man Walks into a Room*) ties these and other plot strands together with surprising twists and turns, chronicling the survival of the human spirit against all odds. Writing with tenderness about eccentric characters, she uses earthy humor to mask pain and to question the universe. Her distinctive voice is both plangent and wry, and her imagination encompasses many worlds.
Nicole Krauss is the author of the international bestsellers *Great House*, a finalist for the National Book Award and the Orange Prize, and *The History of Love*, which won the William Saroyan International Prize for Writing, France’s Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, and was short-listed for the Orange, Médicis, and Femina prizes. Her first novel, *Man Walks Into a Room*, was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award for First Fiction. In 2007, she was selected as one of *Granta’s* Best Young American Novelists, and in 2010 *The New Yorker* named her one of the 20 best writers under 40. Her fiction has been published in *The New Yorker, Harper’s, Esquire*, and *Best American Short Stories*, and her books have been translated into more than thirty-five languages. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.
Discussion Questions

1. Leo Gursky and Alma Singer make an unlikely pair, but what they share in common ultimately brings them together. What are the similarities between these two characters?

2. Leo fears becoming invisible. How does fiction writing prove a balm for his anxiety?

3. Explore the theme of authenticity throughout the narrative. Who's real and who's a fraud?

4. Despite his preoccupation with his approaching death, Leo has a spirit that is indefatigably comic. Describe the interplay of tragedy and comedy in The History of Love.

5. What distinguishes parental love from romantic love in the novel?

6. Why is it so important to Alma that Bird act normal? How normal is Alma?

7. When Alma meets Leo, she calls him the "oldest man in the world." Does his voice sound so ancient?

8. Uncle Julian tells Alma, "Wittgenstein once wrote that when the eye sees something beautiful, the hand wants to draw it." How does this philosophical take on the artistic process relate to the impulse to write in The History of Love?

9. Many different narrators contribute to the story of The History of Love. What makes each of their voices unique? How does Krauss seam them together to make a coherent novel?

10. Survival requires different tactics in different environments. Aside from Alma's wilderness guidelines, what measures do the characters in the novel adopt to carry on?

11. Most all of the characters in the novel are writers --- from Isaac Moritz to Bird Singer. Alma's mother is somewhat exceptional, as she works as a translator. Yet she is not the only character to transform others' words for her creative practice. What are the similarities and differences between an author and a translator?

12. What are the benefits of friendship in the novel? Why might Alma feel more
comfortable remaining Misha’s friend rather than becoming his girlfriend?

13. The fame and adulation Isaac Moritz earns for his novels represent the rewards many writers hope for, while Leo, an unwitting ghostwriter, remains unrecognized for his work. What role does validation play in the many acts of writing in The History of Love?

14. Leo decides to model nude for an art class in order to leave an imprint of his existence. He writes to preserve the memories of his love for Alma Mereminski. Yet drawings and novels are never faithful renditions of the truth. Do you recognize a process of erasure in the stories he tells us?

15. Why might Krauss have given her novel the title The History of Love, the same as that of the fictional book around which her narrative centers?