The Other Side of the Bridge begins in the quiet town of Struan in northern Ontario in the 1930s. It's a place where everyone knows everyone else and neighbors help neighbors. Arthur and Jake Dunn are brothers, although they have opposite personalities. Arthur is solid and good, poised to inherit the family farm, while Jake is attractive and manipulative. They both fall for the beautiful Laura, and she eventually chooses Arthur. Arthur and she raise a family on the farm while Jake disappears. 20 years later, Ian, the son of the town doctor gets a summer job on Arthur's farm, just to be close to Laura. His crush on Laura reignites old tensions and opens old wounds, and Jake finally returns to town. Mary Lawson's story moves back and forth over three decades in the life of the town and her characters. The Other Side of the Bridge has received positive reviews with The Guardian saying, "This is a fine book - an enthralling read, both straightforward and wonderfully intricate. I look forward to Lawson's next."
Mary Lawson (born 1946) is a Canadian novelist.

Born in southwestern Ontario, she spent her childhood in Blackwell, Ontario and is a distant relative of L. M. Montgomery, author of Anne of Green Gables. Her father worked as a research chemist. With a psychology degree in hand from McGill University, Lawson took a trip to Britain and ended up accepting a job as an industrial psychologist. She married a British psychologist, Richard Lawson. Lawson spent her summers in the north, and the landscape inspired her to use northern Ontario as her settings for both her novels.
Discussion Questions

1. How were you affected by the novel’s prologue? What did you discover about Arthur and Jake in this scene? How did your perceptions of the brothers change throughout the book?

2. How would you answer the questions that conclude the prologue? What accounts for the differences between those who follow the rules, like Arthur, and those who defy them? Which came more easily for you as an adolescent: obedience or defiance?

3. How were Jake and Arthur affected by their family dynamic? Did their mother pamper Jake too much? Did their father favor Arthur because he was easier to manage, or was Jake difficult to manage because of his father’s favoritism?

4. What was the effect of the novel’s timeline? How did it compare to your own experience of the continuum between present moments and memory? What parallels run between Ian’s life and Arthur’s?

5. Discuss the use of the headlines that open each chapter. What do they say about the local and global concerns of humanity? In what way were the headlines timeless, and in what way did they convey the unique attributes of this locale? What headlines would be most significant in marking the chapters of your life?

6. What is the significance of the two time periods in the lives of the characters? How were the Dunn brothers shaped by a youth of economic hardship and the presence of POWs? How was Ian shaped by an era of greater liberation, with television for entertainment and “risqué” music on the radio? What dreams for the future did each of these generations possess?

7. Discuss the nature of love and marriage as described in the novel. What made Jake so irresistible to Laura? What made Dr. Christopherson’s wife choose another man? Was Laura’s appeal strictly physical when she first moved to town? What is the riskiest romantic decision you have made?

8. How are the characters shaped by the novel’s setting? What do the natural surroundings of the town mean to them? What separates those who want to escape from those who bask in the town’s familiarity?

9. Why is Ian so transformed by the “day of the dragonflies” that concludes chapter nine? What did these memories mean to him?
10. Discuss the novel’s title. What does it mean for the characters to reach the other side of the bridge? Could Jake and Arthur ever be free of the wounds they inflicted on each other?

11. Who ultimately was responsible for Jake’s fall from the bridge? Who ultimately paid the price (literally, in terms of his medical bills, and figuratively as well)?

12. How did you react to the knowledge that Ian followed in his father’s footsteps after all? Did he make the right decision?

13. Laura confides in Arthur soon after meeting him, telling him she doesn’t believe that God cares about humanity (Chapter Ten). How would you have responded to her?

14. Discuss the cycles of tragedy conveyed in the Dunn family history, from the death of Arthur’s father to the closing scenes of Carter. How do characters cope with the concepts of fate versus intent? How do they cope with regret?

15. What common threads link the families in this novel to those in Crow Lake? What makes rural landscapes so appropriate for both of these storylines? Do you think people who grow up in cities feel the same passion for them as the characters in these two novels feel for the land?

16. If Matt Morrison, the brilliant and adored older brother in Crow Lake, had wandered into this book, which character do you think he would have had more in common with, Ian or Pete?