

Study Guide for Jehanne Dubrow's *Red Army Red*

General Questions for Writing, Discussion, and Review

1. *Red Army Red* is divided into three sections: "cold war," "velvet revolution," and "laissez-faire." What do these three titles tell you about the book's historical, political, or economic concerns?
2. "Chernobyl Year" is placed at the start of *Red Army Red*, before the book's opening section. How does the imagery in "Chernobyl Year" show the intersection of personal and global histories? How does the poem set the tone for the rest of the book?

Questions About Part One: "cold war"

1. "Fancy" explores the secret lives of parents. What discoveries does the speaker make about her parents, as she watches them prepare for and return from a black-tie affair?
2. In "Photograph of My Father with Lech Wałęsa," the speaker describes a rather ordinary and staged photograph. In "Three Generations," the speaker describes a painting by the noted Polish artist, Jerzy Duda-Gracz. Despite their differences, both poems are examples of ekphrasis: poems that take works of visual art as their subjects. What do these poems teach us about Poland, about history, and about visual representations of memory?
3. "Nowa Huta" was a planned city that came to be known as a failed Communist experiment. The poem "Nowa Huta" is written in a traditional French form known as a "villanelle," which contains a predetermined rhyme scheme and a pattern of repeating lines. What does repetition convey about the experience of living in "Nowa Huta?"

Questions About Part Two: "velvet revolution"

1. The language of Communism plays an important role in the second section of *Red Army Red*. Look at poems like "Five-Year Plan," "Velvet Revolution," "Undergarments of the Soviet Era," "Iron Curtain," "A Samizdat History of the Body," "Romance, as Martial Law," and "Eastern Bloc." How do these poems express the oppressiveness of the adolescent body?

2. "November 1989" brings together a girl's coming-of-age with the fall of the Berlin Wall. What do these two kinds of change or transformation have in common?
3. Economic deprivation figures prominently in the second section of *Red Army Red*. In what ways can adolescence be seen as a time of deprivation?

Questions About Part Three: "laissez-faire"

1. The third section of *Red Army Red* marks a shift toward capitalism, following the end of Communism in Eastern Europe. How do poems like "Our Free Market Romance," "Puberty, as the Character of Gordon Gekko," "Russian Red," and "Warsaw Ikea, 2006" explore the difficulty of moving from deprivation to excess? In what ways can adolescence be seen as a time of excess?
2. Like "Photograph of My Father with Lech Wałęsa" and "Three Generations," the poem "Agora" can be categorized as an example of ekphrasis. What does "Agora" tell us about the relationship between individuality and group identity? What other poems in *Red Army Red* explore the power of crowds?
3. "Before Pleasure" begins with an old Polish joke. What is the function of humor in this poem and others in *Red Army Red*?