DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE BOOK OF HARLAN

1. When the story opens, the narrator describes Emma's privileged life in the early 1900s. What might this propose about the accuracy of historical accounts?

2. Describe the narrator of the story. Can we be certain of who it is, or does the point of view shift throughout the story? How does the author's method of narration relate to historical texts?

3. What does *The Book of Harlan* reveal about the society in which it was created? What does it reveal about the way American History (as it pertains to African Americans) is currently taught?

4. Is *The Book of Harlan* simply a historical narrative, or does it also reveal things about contemporary society?

5. While many of the characters represent different classes and races, they also share much in common. What similarities can you find between the characters? How do their differences inform the novel?

6. The author presents many representations of family and relationships. Describe some. Which are most successful? Why do you think this is?

7. Why does Lizard reinvent himself as a black man? How might this reinvention change your perception of race and culture?

8. Were you aware that people of color—black people specifically—lost their lives in the Holocaust? How did that revelation effect you?

9. Many of the characters in the novel are based on the author's ancestors. Harlan Elliott is representative of her grandfather, Harold McFadden. With other characters—both familial and historical—the author uses real names, expanding on and reimagining true events. Why do you think the author chose to write a story centered around her family? Do you feel the portrayals are believable? Accurate? Why or why not?

10. Why do you think that the author chose the quotation by Walt Whitman as the novel's epigraph? What might it signify?