

Discussion Guide: *Open Fire*

1. Why is Katya working in the munitions factory? What values drive her choices?
2. Katya is torn between her father's loyalty to the authoritarian Tsar and the radical new ideas of the socialists. What problems does she see with each side?
3. How has Maxim's experience in the army affected him? What aspects of his inner turmoil is Katya missing?
4. Why is Sergei upset that Katya is thinking of joining the Women's Battalion? How are his views different from—and similar to—the views expressed by Elana Stepanovna?
5. Why does Masha disapprove of the women's rights faction in the battalion?
6. What fragments of information do the women learn about Bochkareva's background? How do you think this background might affect her personality and actions?
7. Why is the story of Saint Olga important to Katya? What does it remind her of? Why does it inspire her?
8. Katya, Masha, Alsu, and Avilova all have different reasons for joining the battalion. Which character's motivations do you find most relatable and why?
9. Reread the scene in which Katya and the other women try to prevent the men from getting to the vodka left by the Germans. When the men find and drink it all anyway, how do you think this makes Katya feel? What does this single moment tell her about the Women's Battalion's overall mission?
10. What does Katya's conversation with her father in the infirmary reveal about him? How do you think this might change their relationship in the future?
11. When Katya is home from the front, mourning Masha, what do the orange flowers and the memory of Masha's hat symbolize for her?
12. Katya says, "There are worthy wars fought badly and unworthy ones fought well, and all of them are hell." Consider another famous conflict. How do you think it compares to Katya's experience of World War I? Do you think it was "worthy" or "unworthy," and what is the difference?
13. What, if anything, do you think the women's sacrifices have accomplished—for their country or for themselves?
14. By the end of the novel, how have Katya's motivations shifted? Where do her loyalties lie now?