

*Controlled Conversations* Book Club Discussion Guide

- What are the book's main themes? Did any resonate with you and why?
- What emotions did the story evoke?
- The narrative of *Controlled Conversations* takes place in a fictional small Polish town of Zygmuntowo. In most ways it mirrors the real town of Augustów. Why do you think did the author change the name of the place?
- What pros and cons do you find in setting the novel in a small provincial town instead of a major city?
- The story is told from multiple points of view. Which characters did you empathize with the most and why?
- What did you learn about Poland in 1982 and life under Soviet control, and what, if anything, surprised you?
- In what other ways did *Controlled Conversations* confirm or subvert your expectations?
- In *Controlled Conversations*, the author portrays both straight and queer relationships. How well is each relationship explored? Is there one you find especially compelling and why?
- How do you feel about a straight, male author including a thread about a lesbian relationship in the novel?
- Why did Emilia start by going along with reporting on her neighbors?
- What do you think happens with Dorota and Antek in the future of the story?
- What happens with Emilia and Kalina after the events of the novel?
- What does the future hold for Agata?
- What drove Roman to do what he did, and why did he make his choices?
- Who is the tragic hero of *Controlled Conversations*?
- Put yourself in the shoes of two or three of the book's characters. Would you make different choices than they did and why?
- What aspects of the story remind you of your present world decades later and many miles away?
- Does the novel make you reflect on events from your own life?

- What deeper insights, if any, did the book help you gain?
- What were your favorite passages or scenes and why?
- What parts of the story did you find the most difficult to read, and how did you get through them?
- Why did the author make work—an occupation, a calling, or a passion—an important characteristic of all key figures in the story?
- If you were to put the book in a genre or genres, what would it/they be and why?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Does it enhance the narrative or detract from it and why?
- Did the author's use of literary devices (metaphors, similes, etc.) make the story more enjoyable or more difficult to read?
- Was the book slow to get going or did it engage you from the start?
- If you could change one thing about the book, as large or as small as you'd like, what would it be?
- You are the casting director for *Controlled Conversations*, the film. Who plays the leading roles?
- What did the author do well and where did he miss the mark?
- What star rating (0 to 5) would you give to *Controlled Conversations*?
- Would you recommend this book? Why and why not?
- Who is the author, and why do you think he wrote this book? Why in English?
- What questions would you like to ask the author about the novel?