



***The Overstory* by Richard Powers**

Discussion Questions

1. How do the four sections of the novel, Roots, Trunk, Crown, & Seeds reflect that human development mimics growth in the natural world?
2. The Hoel family keeps a photographic record of the American chestnut tree in their field. In what way does this photographic record of the tree's life mirror the family's own life?
3. Of the novel's nine opening stories, which do you find most engaging? Why?
4. What do you make of Patricia Westerford's statement:
You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor. A billion and a half years ago, the two of you parted ways. But

even now, after an immense journey in separate directions, that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes.

5. Westerford also says, “ Forests panic people. Too much going on there. Humans need a sky.” What do you think of this statement?
6. How does Powers treat eco-warriors? What is your attitude toward eco-warriors, both ones in the novel and in real life?
7. Do the characters in the novel come alive for you; are they multi-faceted and possessing emotional depth? Or, do you see them as one-dimensional and serving mainly as the embodiment of ideas?
8. Did this novel change the way you look at trees?
9. What might the title, *Overstory*, signify? What is the pun at its heart?
10. What do you think of this observation by the lawyer who turns to novels for solace but then seems to question their value?:
To be human is to confuse a satisfying story with a meaningful one...The world is failing precisely because no novel can make the

*contest for the world seem as compelling as the struggles between
a few lost people.*

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