

*Milk and Tides* by Margaret Hasse  
**Questions to Explore – Readers and Book Clubs**

1. The poems in *Milk and Tides*, especially those in the section called “Milk” (pages 9-40), present the story of a woman who longs for children and ultimately finds a rich experience of motherhood through adoption. In what ways does motherhood through adoption seem similar to motherhood through giving birth; in what ways does the motherhood experience in the book seem different?
2. In the second section of the book, called “Tides” (pages 45-66), you encounter poems about the ebb and flow of life as the female voice in the poems comes to terms with the process of aging. What common themes or issues related to getting older do the poems encompass? For example, the poem, “Winter Blessing” (page 61), describes the sensation of becoming less vibrant or visible as a woman, of “...dissolving / into the gray landscape / of middle age.”
3. Reviewers have described the poems in *Milk and Tides* as “intimate.” Do you think that the poems are completely factual—with verisimilitude to the poet’s life—or that invention plays a part in the poems? What contributes to your ideas about this?
4. If the depictions of the children in the poems resemble actual young people, do you think that exposing aspects of their lives in a book like *Milk and Tides* is fair to them? Why or why not?
5. The opening poem in the book, the Prologue (page 3), is a “list poem” naming occurrences, things, and people that “save” the narrator of the poem. What does “save” mean in this poem? What “saves” you? Do poems “save” people? Why or why not?
6. The poem, “A Breeze Bends the Grasses” (page 51), is reprinted in an anthology called *Beloved on the Earth: 150 Poems of Grief and Gratitude*. The poem has been called a poem of forgiveness—but of whom? Is the poet forgiving the father? Herself? Refer to words in the poem as you respond.
7. Words often used to describe the qualities of a poetic voice in a volume of poetry include challenging, accessible, narrative, lyrical, formal, informal. Describe qualities of the poetic voice in *Milk and Tides*, citing examples.
8. Can you choose one poem in particular that stays with you? Why does the poem resonate for you?