1. Both Dolssa and Botille become fugitives at some point. In what ways do their escapes and journeys parallel each other? How does hiding from a threat influence their beliefs and actions?

2. Botille, her sisters, and Dolssa are all young women making their way through a heavily patriarchal world without the support of parents or a husband or the Church. How does their independence affect perceptions of them? In what ways does the community reject or support them because of their gender and familial status?

3. Who are the villains of the story? What makes them a villain? What sympathetic or redeeming qualities do they have, if any? To what extent should people who do evil things be viewed as sympathetic?

4. Dolssa’s mother says “For my sake, guard your tongue to guard your life, my daughter” (p. 10). Would it have been better for Dolssa to remain silent instead of speaking out? Why or why not? At what other points in the story does the dilemma of silence vs. standing up for one’s beliefs play a role for any of the characters?

5. The Passion of Dolssa is rooted in historical events and uses Old Provençal words to develop the setting. What aspects of the book do you find the most relatable today? Do you see any parallels between our world and the one Botille and Dolssa live in?

Discussion questions contributor: Luisa Perkins
6. There are many narrators throughout the book, from the main characters like Dolssa and Botille to minor characters like Hugo to the villagers whose testimony Lucien records. What do these perspectives add to the story? How would the book be different if we did not hear the words and voices of these multiple minor characters?

7. How does Dolssa’s presence cause the village community to develop or fragment? Is her influence for the better or for the worse? What do you think she should have said or done differently after her arrival in the village?

8. Compare Dolssa’s actions when she is separated from her beloved and her mother to Botille’s actions when she is separated from her sisters and Symo. How do Dolssa and Botille react to loss? To reunion?

9. Botille and her sisters each have a specific gift or calling: matchmaking, fortune-telling, or hospitality. How do these gifts impact the sisters’ influence on one another and on their community? What significance do the gifts have to Botille once she is separated from her sisters?

10. At the very end of the book, Fernando wonders, “But which was the greater sin? To lie, or to help a heretic?” (p. 446). How does this moral dilemma show up throughout the book for different characters? What might Fernando himself decide to do after the book ends?

Discussion questions contributor: Luisa Perkins
11. At the end of the book, Botille says of her sister Sazia, “If I’d had to spot her solely on the life she led, I never would have recognized her. Would those who knew me ever recognize me?” (p. 420). How do the values of and choices made by the characters change over the course of the book? Are the changes for the better or for the worse?

12. What happens to the story if you consider each of the three main characters (Botille, Dolssa, and Lucien) as antagonists to the other two? What does each pair of enemies fight over?

13. Botille and her sisters go from homeless outcasts to valued contributors to their community; Dolssa, who once lived a privileged life, travels the opposite way. What is significant about this reversal of character arcs?

14. The good intentions of minor characters often produce disastrous results for the main characters in the story. Is this a reflection of reality? Why or why not?