QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WRITER’S CRAFT:

1. Don Aker chose to tell his story alternately from Reef’s and then Leeza’s third-person points of view. What effect does this continual shift in point of view have on the reader’s perception of the events?

2. There is one scene during the novel when the author deviates from this point of view, choosing to present a scene from the viewpoint of other characters. In which scene does this occur? Why do you suppose the author chose to present this scene in this manner?

3. Why do you think the author divided his novel into three parts? Would it have been as effective without these divisions? Tell why or why not.

4. Writers use a variety of details to convey strong impressions of characters, including the following: (1) physical appearance, (2) setting, (3) action, (4) dialogue, (5) reaction (a character’s thoughts and feelings), and (6) observations made by other characters. Illustrate Don Aker’s use of these details in *The First Stone* by explaining how they convey an understanding of particular characters in the novel.

5. Every character in a novel—even the most minor—must serve a definite purpose, which can include one or more of the following:
   - to advance the plot
   - to give the reader information about other characters or about the conflict
   - to provide “comic relief”

   Choose five minor characters in the novel and comment on their function. Give examples of scenes in the novel that illustrate your ideas.

6. Comment on the author’s choice of names for his characters. Is it significant that none of the novel’s major characters use their birth names? Comment on the importance of the following line in Chapter 28: “[Reef] traced his fingers over her signature, lingering over the second syllable she’d finally chosen to use.”

7. Many of the novel’s main events are shown after-the-fact in the form of flashbacks. Give examples of three important events that are related in flashbacks, and explain why you think the author chose not to sequence these events chronologically.

8. Read the novel’s first and final pages. What image is repeated in both? What purpose does it serve?
9. A critic once commented that a novelist is allowed only one coincidence. What role does coincidence play in *The First Stone*? Does Don Aker rely too heavily on coincidence in his novel? Explain.

10. Re-read the comment on the novel’s cover written by Tim Wynne-Jones. Would you agree with his assessment of the novel? Why or why not?

11. An epigraph is a statement, often a quotation, at the beginning of a literary work that identifies an important theme. Comment on Don Aker’s choice of epigraph for *The First Stone*. Is it appropriate? Why or why not?

12. Profanity is always a major concern among parents and educators when it appears in young adult fiction. Do you think its use in *The First Stone* is gratuitous? Tell why or why not.

**EXTENDING YOUR READING:**

1. Don Aker includes in his novel two passages from Robert Frost’s poem “The Death of the Hired Man,” one in the epigraph and the other in the final chapter. Locate a copy of the poem and read it twice. Does knowledge of this poem help further your understanding of the novel? Explain.

2. Readers often wonder whether Reef and Leeza ever see each other again. Using either Reef’s or Leeza’s third-person viewpoint, discuss a scene in which the two characters might plausibly meet again.

3. In the novel’s final chapters, readers learn what happened to Scar, and they have a hint about what lies in store for Reef. What do you suppose will happen to Jink and Bigger? Consider their lives ten years from now—what will they be doing and what will they be like? How do you know?

4. The experiences of the character Alex Praeger suggest some of the obstacles faced by gay youths. Explore how gay youths are presented in contemporary fiction, films, and/or television programming.

5. Canada’s Youth Criminal Justice Act replaced the Young Offenders’ Act in 2003. Locate each on the Internet and explain how the present Act differs from its predecessor.