

***Voyage of Mercy* Book Club Discussion Questions**

- Did ***Voyage of Mercy*** teach you new details of American history? For example, did you know that Americans contributed in such widespread fashion to Irish famine relief?
- What surprised you most about the information you learned in ***Voyage of Mercy***?
- Before you read ***Voyage of Mercy***, how much did you know about the Irish potato famine of 1846-47? Did anything surprise you about the famine?
- The two main characters in the book are *USS Jamestown* captain Robert Bennet Forbes and Irish priest Father Theobald Mathew. What were your impressions of each man and their actions during the famine?
- Sir Charles Trevelyan was the British bureaucrat in charge of the Irish famine relief effort – what were your thoughts about Trevelyan’s actions and the attitude of London in general toward the starving Irish population?
- In the book, Puleo discusses the religious and social issues that led to the Irish people’s over-reliance on potatoes. Did you know of these issues or did they come as a surprise to you?
- In his Author’s Note, Puleo marvels at the generosity of Americans in 1847-48, especially the fact that they contributed food that they had planted, cultivated, and harvested to feed their families. How do you think you would have reacted at the time? Would you do the same today?
- In addition to kicking off America’s first humanitarian mission, the voyage of the ***Jamestown*** also established a public-private partnership model that America has used since to provide aid to victims of famine, natural disasters, and other hardships. Were you surprised to learn this? Were you surprised to learn that – before the American relief effort to Ireland in 1847 – nations did not provide humanitarian aid to the citizens of other nations?
- *Voyage of Mercy* discusses in detail the legacy of the famine – how it soured and even poisoned Irish-British relations for 175 years, how it influenced Irish culture, and how it generally resulted in positive U.S.-Irish relations. Did any part of this story surprise you? For example, did you know that Ireland maintained its neutrality during World War II so it would not have to ally itself with England, a decision that harkened back to the English handling of the Great Famine?
- If you’re of Irish heritage, is the famine mentioned in your family lore or history? If you’re not of Irish heritage, do you have friends or relatives who know and talk about the famine and its central role in Irish history?
- Have you read other books by Stephen Puleo? If so, how does ***Voyage of Mercy*** compare in terms of writing quality and storytelling? If not, would you be inclined to read another Puleo book?