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## Book Discussion Guide

### *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson

created by Tyler Mark Nelson

#### Introduction

The Summer Fiction Book Club invites you to become immersed in the creative world of fiction books while daring to explore challenging topics related to climate change and environmental injustice. Each month, participants read a selected book on their own time, and then we gather virtually to discuss as a group. In addition to small group discussion, a guest conversation partner joins to offer their thoughts on the book and shares about its impact in their life.

Simply put, fiction has the potential to reveal present realities and imagine possible futures. Through truth-telling, a good story confronts the current systems of power, the unequal material conditions, or the overwhelming circumstances that prevent all life from flourishing. It gives voice to whomever or whatever has been silenced, forgotten, or ignored — the lives of marginalized humans and exploited nonhumans, the values or perspectives that advocate for collective good, or the complex emotions that humans may experience during planetary polycrisis. Fiction can also be a window through which we envision compelling and creative possibilities, whether social, ecological, political, or economic. Imagining what worlds are possible creates the opportunity for us to build towards a better and more just future.

Reading fiction together is a dynamic way for humans to make sense of the world(s) in which we live. By coming together to discuss these books, we also collectively share the weightiness of the subjects. Readers may find the book club to be a space where they can encounter fictional worlds, exercise their imaginative capacities, and even explore and experience their own emotions through the narrative lens of fiction.

The following discussion questions can be used by any group wishing to engage around the novel *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson. A video clip from the discussion of the novel during our Summer Fiction Book Club in August 2023 is offered to provide additional perspective and basis for discussion.

### **Intro to *The Ministry for the Future***

*The Ministry for the Future* is a boldly inventive work of cli-fi, or climate fiction, by the American science fiction author, Kim Stanley Robinson. His book combines elements of environmental horror, utopian visions, eco-terrorism, cutthroat geopolitics, economic analysis, ecological education, critiques of Western colonialism and neoliberal neocolonialism, and much more. Heard across the 105 chapters of this book are a range of voices and perspectives, from Arctic scientists to climate refugees and from stubborn economists to the basic elements of the cosmos. In this book, Robinson imagines what would happen if a governmental entity was tasked with the mission of advocating for the rights of future generations, all while dealing with the real-world trajectory of climate change.

**Guest Conversationalist from our August 2023 Summer Fiction Book Club:** Derrick Weston

### **Video clip**

[Link to Session Recording](#)

Discussion: 07:54 — 23:01 (15:07 minutes long)

### **Discussion questions**

1. What is one theme, scene, or conversation that had a strong impact on you? Why?
2. This book gives us thoroughly researched snapshots of the likely effects of climate change in the near future. When you consider the possible world that future generations will inherit, who does this invite you to be?
3. Fredric Jameson, who was Robinson's doctoral supervisor, famously stated: "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism." Robinson's inventive attention to economics, policy, and technological innovation indicates that he believes it might be possible to transform capitalism into a system which saves the world — imperfectly. How does the book influence your understanding of the relationship between climate change and capitalism?
4. The story poses all sorts of challenging questions about violence. There's the violence of the Children of Kali, violence of nation-states through their policies, violence of the capitalist market and corporations who choose short-term profit over long-term life, the secret violence of the Ministry for the Future, violence of extreme weather events, and so on. Coming from your faith or spirituality, how do you think about political violence in the face of death-dealing realities? What does it mean to show up compassionately in communities who experience these types of violence?
5. The title of this book, *The Ministry for the Future*, and the intergovernmental agency of the same name, raise imperative questions about what it means to act towards the benefit of future generations. When you consider future generations and the world which they will inherit from us, who do you feel invited to be in this time?
6. On page 349, while describing the wet-bulb 38 event in the American South that killed well over 300,000 people, the narrator says: "Not as large as the great Indian heat wave had been, but this time it was Americans, in America. That fact made a difference, especially to Americans. Although still, in the months that followed, people's biases emerged. It was the South where it

had happened. It was mostly poor people, in particular poor people of color. It couldn't happen in the North. It couldn't happen to prosperous white people... This was yet another manifestation of racism and contempt for the South, yes, but also of a universal cognitive disability, in that people had a very hard time imagining that catastrophe could happen to them, until it did." There is a lot happening here. Discuss the different threads and themes that are woven throughout this passage.