

Kathleen Ernst
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST
cloud-studded blue sky.



Discussion Guide for *Heritage of Darkness*

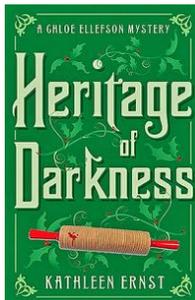
Chloe Ellefson Historic Sites Mystery #4

Written by Kathleen Ernst

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Although she tried to hide it from Mom and Roelke, Chloe Ellefson's emotional distress inflated with each passing mile. Distress descended into panic by the time they left Wisconsin.

Thus begins the fourth book in the popular, multiple award-winning, Chloe Ellefson Historic Sites mystery series. These stories combine history and mystery with a little romance, and are written for adults and mature teens who enjoy books *without* explicit sex, gratuitous violence, or gore.



For curator Chloe Ellefson, a family bonding trip to Decorah, Iowa for rosemaking classes seems like a great idea—until the drive begins. Chloe's cop friend Roelke takes her mother's talk of romantic customs good-naturedly, but it inflates Chloe's emotional distress higher with each passing mile.

After finally reaching Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Chloe's resolve to remain positive is squashed when she and Roelke find Petra Lekstrom's body in an antique immigrant trunk on display in the museum.

Everyone is shaken by the instructor's murder, and when Mom volunteers to take over the beginners' class, Chloe is put in the hot seat of motherly criticism. As Chloe and Roelke investigate, they uncover dark family secrets that could be deadly—for all three of them.

Bestselling author Kathleen Ernst writes mysteries, historical fiction, and non-fiction books for adults and young readers. Her work has earned numerous honors, including an Emmy, a LOVEY, and nominations for an Edgar Allen Poe and multiple Agatha Christie mystery awards.

SPOILER ALERT! The following pages reveal key plot points.



1. Although Chloe initiated the trip to Vesterheim as a way to forge a stronger bond with her mother, she quickly decided she'd made a mistake, as she told Roelke:

Mom's speaking to me. She just isn't talking to me, you know?

Did the two women grow any closer by the end of their difficult week? Had progress been made? Why do you think Marit was slow to respond to Chloe's overtures? What might Chloe or Marit have done differently? What role, if any, did Violet play?

2. Roelke joined the trip to Decorah believing he could help Chloe in her efforts to grow closer to her mom. He quickly realized his folly:

In that moment Roelke realized he was a complete and utter moron. Why had he thought he could help ease tension between Chloe, who he was only beginning to understand, and Marit, who he barely knew?

Was Roelke wise to travel with Chloe and Mom, or was it too soon for him to join a family trip? What did he do well? What might he have done better?

3. As Chloe conducts the folklore interviews, she learns that some cozy or religious traditions actually originated during pagan times, when many people feared the short, dark days of late December. Did the discussions and examples bring to mind any of your family's or community's holiday observances?
4. For many people who are generations removed from immigration, old-world ethnic customs emerge most strongly during holidays. Have any heritage recipes or food traditions been passed down in your family? Other customs?
5. Marit likes rosemaling in part because it evokes thoughts about her ancestors. Roelke likes chip carving because the geometric precision

KATHLEEN ERNST WRITES FROM 1982 INTO 1870s
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the trees, pretty, and against a
cloud-studded blue sky.



10. When the book ends, Roelke is struggling with the investigation's outcome—and his role in it. Was he right to berate himself? Did you like Chloe's response in the final pages? If you've read the first three books in the series, how do you feel about their relationship status? Where do you think the relationship might be headed?

Hosting a book discussion? Consider serving Chloe's tomato soup.
Download the recipe from this book's page on Kathleen's website.
Or, invite guests to bring a dish that evokes holiday memories.

Kathleen did extensive research when writing this book. Some of her discoveries ended up influencing the story; others appear in the book. A rich mix of these 'behind the scene' details about the people, places, and the past that went into the creating this story are available online.

In addition to this guide, Kathleen's website includes an interactive custom Google map showing where key scenes are set, a slide show of story-related artifacts and descriptions, an author's note, book reviews, a short video introducing the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, plus author interviews, many book-related blog posts, and the recipe.

You can discover all this and more at www.kathleernerst.com/heritage.