

Churchill's Triumph

1. Triumph and betrayal are two words with very different, almost polar opposite, meanings. Is it a contradiction that the book is titled *Churchill's Triumph: A Novel of Betrayal*? What role does betrayal play in Churchill's triumph?
2. Churchill seems to have an extraordinary empathy for people he has barely met. He feels great guilt for the lot of the Polish and the suffering of the Russian peasants. But he refuses to do anything when confronted with the suffering of people he knows, such as his daughter or the Polish "plumber." How can Churchill be so empathetic, yet so cold?
3. Churchill "had always insisted that the worst sin was not to have done what might prove wrong but to have done nothing at all. His motto had been simple, forthright. Keep Bugging On!" Do you think this code serves Churchill well at Yalta? Do you think that against a bullying Stalin and weak Roosevelt his strategy finally fails?
4. "History would judge him kindly, if only because he had written so much of it, but what about Eternity? What verdict would that pass on him?" What do you think Churchill means by this? How does judgment of Eternity differ from the judgment of History?
5. On the road to Yalta, Churchill encounters two impoverished and malnourished children. After years confronting the terrors of war, why does this make such an impression on him? Is it possible to be dulled to the horror of human suffering?
6. The author says that the English bombing of Dresden, that killed thousands, was something that always weighed on Churchill's conscience. How are the standards of right and wrong different during wartime than during a time of peace?
7. How does the impoverished landscape of Russia affect the foreign participants in the conference at Yalta?
8. Everyone at the conference knows that Stalin is ruthless. He openly spies on the English and Americans, and his own advisors are terrified of him. Yet, when the conference becomes tense, Stalin always seems to get his way. What makes Stalin such a powerful negotiator?
9. Stalin says to Churchill, "Your trouble, Prime Minister, is that you believe in the power of truth. But power *is* truth." What does Stalin mean by this? Do you agree with his sentiments?
10. One of the main political arguments in the book is whether the United Nations is a realistic way to manage global politics. Today, this remains a heated controversy. Do you feel there are other political conflicts at the Yalta conference that remain unsolved?
11. Stalin inspires fear in both Churchill and Roosevelt. While Roosevelt responds by capitulating to the dictator, fear makes Churchill fight even harder. How have you responded to fear at different points in your life?

12. The novel begins with an episode highlighting Churchill's tense relationship with his son. How does this foreshadow the events of the Yalta conference?
13. This book is about chaos – as much in victory as in war. How does the horror of war extend itself into peace? Are there parallels to this in today's world?
14. Stalin, a master of deceit, says "In our alliance, the Allies should not deceive each other." Do you think this sentiment is true? Or are there times when one should deceive an ally?
15. "Katyn would be the conscience of them all." In a novel where characters try hard to ignore their conscience, is this meant to remind the reader of the failure of the Western powers? Or does it simply explain what motivated Churchill to succeed at Yalta?