Guns, Germs, and Steel:
The Fates of Human Societies

Take notes as you go, in the book, on paper, or on your computer. Write down words you do not know and look them up. Also keep a list of questions that you have about the book: Feel free to post them, as well as your opinions, to the Watauga Blog for other students to answer.

Prologue: Yali's Question

Why do you think Diamond chooses to begin his book with a question? Why do you think Yali's question is relevant for us today?

Diamond proposes his answer to Yali's question: Do you find this persuasive so far? If so, why? If not, what kind of evidence would he have to supply to persuade you?

Diamond challenges some common explanations for differences among human societies. Are you familiar with these explanations? Do you know people who share them? Feel free to post your ideas on the Watauga Blog.

Part One: From Eden to Cajamarca

Take note of this title. Where is Cajamarca? What is Diamond referring to? What do you expect to learn in this section of the book? Why would Diamond choose to start here?

Chapter One: Up to the Starting Line

Diamond says: "An observer transported back in time to 11.000 B.C. could not have predicted on which continent human societies would develop most quickly, but could have made a strong case for any of the continents." Why does Diamond begin his story at this point in human history; why not sooner or later?

Chapter Two: A Natural Experiment of History

How does the fact that the Maori defeated the Moriori (a "natural experiment of history") support Diamond's argument?

Chapter Three: Collision at Cajamarca

Pizarro defeated the Incan emperor Atahuallpa, just like the Maori defeated the Moriori in the previous chapter. Why does Diamond use historical anecdotes to support his argument at this point in the book, rather than some other kind of evidence, like statistics?

Can you think of a time when a less materially advanced society defeated a more materially advanced society? If you can, doesn't that cast doubt on Diamond's claim?