Discussion Questions for *Backstage: Stories from My Life in Public Television*
Author: Ron Hull

1. When he was young, Hull accidently found out he was adopted. Do you agree with his parents' reaction to him learning the truth? Do we see this affecting his actions in the future?

2. When asked by a Sergeant in Oklahoma if he had any television experience, Hull said he did despite having hardly even watched TV. What do you think made him make this leap of faith that began his long career? Are there other times where this self-assuredness serves him well?

3. After being caught on a date with another woman, Hull comes to the conclusion "*Do anything you wish, but remember, someone is always watching.*" What do you take from this advice? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

4. While in Vietnam, Hull had big dreams for the future of television in the country, especially in the case of education. *"What ideas could we give them that would sometimes, somehow, make their lives better? Would the imaginations of those children down there be sparked in ways that would help them reach their dreams and potential? Were we doing anything that would be meaningful to them? And would it be lasting?"* Do you think the project was a success or does the immorality America's actions and propaganda in the Vietnam War erase that? What does Hull think?

5. Hull leaves the Foreign Service after listening to Mary McCarthy's "*verbal assault, calling our situation in Vietnam a debacle and possibly the greatest foreign policy bungle of our nation's history.*" What do his thoughts after the dinner say about his personal growth, and character? Discuss his return to Vietnam and the TV station at the end of the book and his interactions with Mr. Khac.

6. In *Backstage*, Hull talks about his great friendships with exciting and influential women, making sure to remark on their attractiveness and dating habits. In one memorable anecdote, Hull watches a TV Producer in the late 70s grope a famous actress to "encourage her" and paints this as a fond memory of his friend. How do you interpret Hull's relationships with women? Are they what one would expect from the era? How has the world of television changed since the writing of this book in 2012?

    a. (**Note:** The "#MeToo" movement surrounding the television and film industry gained traction in 2017)

7. Hull is a well-known and self-pronounced "name dropper". Does this hurt or help his credibility in Public Television in securing much needed funding and support? Did you find the mentions of celebrities or powerful people a helpful tool in learning about Hull's life?

8. Hull contemplates the slow loss of live television due to the changing media landscape: "*There was that electric sense of excitement, of importance, when you sent that signal, at that very moment into people's homes. That sense of urgency is diminished in the refinement of perfecting everything through multiple tapings until the talent and production crew get it right. Often during this process the original vitality is lost along with that sense of power, of instantly connecting*

with the audience." Do you agree with this sentiment? How must it have felt to have been involved in live television from its inception to its possible end?

9. Does Hull come off hopeful about the state of educational television in the end of the book? What is the lasting legacy of his work that we see today? What would he think about the current state of public television in America?

10. *Backstage* won the 2013 Nebraska Book Award for Nonfiction: Autobiography and was recognized as a notable book for Nebraska's "150 Celebration". Would you give it an award? How does it add to the Nebraskan literary cannon?