Discussion Questions 1. In New England, apple picking is an autumn ritual for kids and has been for years. Are there similar harvest rituals in your community? Do you participate in them? Why? What draws you to these rituals?

2. The desire for sweetness is hardwired in human beings. We probably evolved in this direction because edible plants are fairly rare in nature, and sweetness was usually an indication to early humans that a plant was both safe to eat and rich in the calories we needed to ensure we didn’t starve. Today, given the proliferation of artificially sweetened products available to us, does our evolution betray us or have we betrayed our evolution? Explain what you mean.

3. Johnny Appleseed is said to have compared himself to a bee. What do you think he meant? Is it an accurate analogy?

4. Historians think that Johnny Appleseed refused to graft apples because of his religious beliefs — that he thought grafting was tampering with the natural world, and therefore wrong. Do you see any similarities between his view and the modern emphasis on biodiverse gardening? How are they similar? How are they different? Would Johnny Appleseed be likely to have philosophical qualms about today’s monoculture style of apple growing? How about you?

5. In referring to the negative perception of the apple by prohibitionists like Carrie Nation, Michael Pollan talks about the return of the apple tree to the Biblical Garden of Eden. Can you think of other edibles that have similarly been subjected to changing perceptions of their value to us, in the areas of health, lifestyle or social mores?

6. Compare the apple industry’s “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” to more modern slogans involving food products. What has been their impact? What if it had been “broccoli today keeps the doctor away?” Would we have seen a similar reaction among consumers, or is there something peculiar about an apple that makes it uniquely appropriate for the marketing jingle?