

Reading Group Guide

*Guide contains spoilers, so don't read before completing the novel.

1. Throughout the story, there are several instances of symbolism. Can you name three?
2. When Darlene takes a job outside of the home for the first time in her marriage, she admits to herself and others several reasons for her choice. What are these reasons, and why do you think she chose a job working with children?
3. Every member of the family keeps a secret at some point—except for Ansley. Whose secret is never revealed?
4. Overcoming guilt plays a large role in several of the characters' lives—Darlene, Brad, Chad, Grace, and Layla. How do they each get past it? Have you ever let guilt bog you down, and if so . . . how did you handle it?
5. Teenage “cutting” is a growing problem. Have you ever heard of it before or known a family that has been affected by it? If so, did the problem resolve itself, or did the teen seek counseling?
6. When Layla dies, she says her daughter's name. Do you think she really saw Marissa? Have you ever had a friend or loved one who experienced something similar as they passed on?
7. There are several times when characters unrightfully judge one another. The most obvious would be when Darlene and Brad judge Skylar by the way she dresses. What are some other examples of passing judgment?
8. When Brad lies to Darlene about the investments he made, we know that he was doing it to provide for his family, and in the end it all worked out. But if Darlene hadn't caught him on the phone in the barn, do you think he ever would have told her about it?

9. Layla shows up in church to thank God for answering her prayers about Tom. At this point, is she still somewhat nonchalant about the Lord's role in her life? And if so, when does she truly begin to have a relationship with Him?
10. God has a plan for everything. Why did He bring Darlene and Layla together? What roles did they play in each other's lives that neither of them could have foreseen?
11. Do you feel like Darlene and Brad have a good marriage? Could they have benefited from counseling, as Darlene suggested?
12. What are your thoughts about Dave? Did he pursue Darlene? Did you have compassion for him and his situation? How much do you blame him for his indiscretions in the barn with Darlene—or do you? Do you hope that he finds someone to spend his life with and to be a good mother to Cara, or does he not deserve such happiness after almost wrecking Darlene and Brad's marriage?
13. Do you think Darlene would have ever kissed Dave in the barn if she hadn't suspected Brad of infidelity? What were her motives? Did she feel justified? Lonely? And how did her betrayal ultimately affect her?
14. When Darlene and Brad are arguing a lot, their discord is fueled by their worry for Grace. But what inner feelings are each of them harboring that cause resentment of the other?
15. If you live in the city, have you ever dreamed of escaping to a quieter life in the country? Does geography really have anything to do with the peace we have in our hearts?
16. Do you think Darlene and Brad's betrayal and lies will make their marriage stronger now? Or would they have been better off without any of it? Has there ever been a time within your own marriage when poor judgment ended up strengthening your bond?