

- 1 In the beginning of the book, Billie returns from her more urban adult life to the rural Mississippi Delta she knew in childhood. Describe Benz's portrayal of the Delta community, and what commentary it makes on the cultural, economic, and political rural South of today.
- 2 Billie has a somewhat fractured relationship with her family, including Southern relatives she hasn't seen in years before arriving in the Delta, and she doesn't necessarily receive a warm welcome. Discuss how Billie's family history and the ruptures of her childhood shape her identity into the character we meet in the story.
- 3 Since Billie lost her father at such a young age, she knows him as an adult primarily through his writing, even seeking out the Avalon in one scene when she discovers it is a real place and not just imagined in her father's poetry. Can you talk about a time that you felt like you knew someone through their writing (or perhaps another creative endeavor) alone?
- 4 The central drive of the narrative is around finding answers to a crime from long ago and what justice can or should look like in a case like Billie's that spans decades and touches an entire community. What do you think the book suggests on whether justice is possible in this scenario?
- 5 The search for what really happened to Billie's father brings her up against entrenched histories of racism and bigotry in the community. Discuss the subtle (and obvious) ways that she encounters the lingering wounds of slavery and continued prejudice. Did you recognize any from your own experiences?
- 6 What did you make of Billie's tangled family history with the McGees and her relationship with Harlan? Was it a doomed romance from the start?
- 7 The book raises the issue of legacy as Billie discovers her father's lost papers and considers her level of participation in working with Dr. Hurley. Discuss how the ideas of legacy and inheritance play out in the novel.
- 8 Discuss the ending. What was your reaction to Billie's final confrontation with Curtis and what do you think Billie's future holds?
- 9 As mentioned, the book addresses racial tensions and distrust that exist in American culture today. In your opinion, what can be done to address this problem, both on a large scale and within smaller communities like Greendale?

