



Discover. Read. Share.

WHY WE LOVE *Learning to Speak Southern*

Dear reader,

The spotlight title for this quarter's book club, *Learning to Speak Southern*, is a family drama that examines mother/daughter bonds, friendship, mental health, and the resounding effects of keeping secrets. It's Lindsey Rogers Cook's second novel (after *How to Bury Your Brother*), and she's a gifted writer, expertly interweaving a present-day story with the ephemera of unread letters. Like other entries in the increasingly popular genre of contemporary Southern fiction, it is peppered with mystery and intrigue, built on an undercurrent of tragic secrets, and will appeal to many, leaving you eager for more.

The novel follows Alexandra "Lex" Henry, who has been running since her mother's tragic death. After years of fleeing from place to place, she finds herself in a hospital after suffering a devastating miscarriage. Her ex-boyfriend wants her to reach out to someone, and with few options, she grudgingly accepts help from her godmother, Cami, which means going home to Memphis.

Almost immediately, Lex is ready to bolt. But Cami has a trick up her sleeve: a stack of letters from Lex's mother that she'll only give Lex once she completes tasks, from the benign (get a new wardrobe) to the laborious (clean up the garden) to the intimidating (reach out to the childhood best friend she abandoned). And Cami knows her goddaughter: Lex can't resist her proposal. As Lex completes one task after another, what she discovers in those letters changes everything she knows about her family and, ultimately, herself.

A quick and intimate read, *Learning to Speak Southern* embraces the classic story of a daughter realizing that within her mother was a woman she never knew. But it is also, importantly, a story about facing trauma—and the ongoing difficulty of doing so.

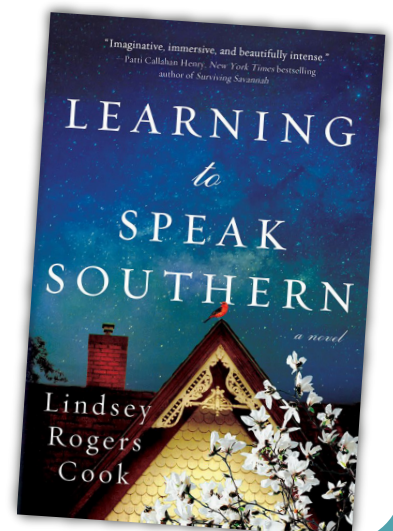
For the many who have had the misfortune of a miscarriage or have suffered with suicidal ideation, this book may offer assurances that you are not alone—but it may also be too hard, a trigger for trauma that's still being processed. So if you need to skip the spotlight title this time, it's okay: please choose another of the eight offerings in its place.

For the rest of us, the novel offers not only an important glimpse into these often undiscussed experiences but also insight into coping with any kind of trauma at all. Because we do all face trauma—whether big or small, chronic or situational, personal or even communal, as in case of the global pandemic we're all still navigating. And like Lex, once we're ready to come out the other side, we have to learn how to re-engage with the world, and that can be a struggle. We may not all have a Cami in our lives or the tantalizing prize of a box of unread letters to motivate us, but right now, at least, we do have this book, its lessons, and the opportunity to experience reading it together: the opportunity to recognize how hard those first small tasks can be, how important it is to speak about what's so often left unspoken, and how crucial it is to give people the space and support they need to figure out the entirety of their health—mental and physical—especially since, one day, we'll be the person in need.

So as you read along this quarter, please share what you think @hoopladigital, and add #hooplabookclub to engage in discussion with your fellow readers too.

Happy reading!

Andi Paris, hoopla digital





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About the Author

Lindsey Rogers Cook is the author of two novels, *How to Bury Your Brother* and *Learning to Speak Southern*. She works at *The New York Times* as a senior editor for digital storytelling and training and she graduated from the University of Georgia. She lives in Hoboken, New Jersey, with her husband and a small zoo of rescue animals.



Selected Praise for *Learning to Speak Southern*

"Women's fiction lovers won't be able to put down this story of transformation, coming-of-age and the true meaning of family. Lindsey Rogers Cook has hit her stride!"

—**Kristy Woodson Harvey, *USA Today* bestselling author**

"Evoking the south in language as rich as the mystical landscape, Lindsey Cook has confirmed her place in the lexicon of Southern Fiction. We meet Lex as she is at the edge of losing everything but her beloved love of words, language and how they shape our lives. You will dwell deeply in the lyrical narrative of *Learning to Speak Southern* and you will not want to leave. Imaginative, immersive and beautifully intense, this is your new favorite read!"

—**Patti Callahan Henry, *New York Times* bestselling author**

"Readers of Southern and women's fiction will become deeply immersed in this mother-daughter narrative." —***Library Journal***

Selected Praise for *How to Bury Your Brother*

"Lindsey Cook is a radiant new voice in southern fiction...an author, who will grab your heart and not let go even after the very last page."

—**Patti Callahan Henry, *New York Times* bestselling author**

"[A]n author to watch....[and] for fans of Celeste Ng and Joshilyn Jackson."

—***Booklist***