

Discussion Guide

Cedar Hollow Promises

Cedar Hollow Promises is built for conversation. The questions it raises about forgiveness, accountability, justice, and the true cost of love resist simple answers. This guide is designed for book clubs and readers willing to engage the emotional and moral complexity of Lena and Malik's journey.

1. Redemption and Change

What does genuine redemption require, and how do you know when it is real? Can remorse alone transform a person, or must redemption always be proven through action and sacrifice?

2. Faith Versus Religion

Lena's faith sustains her throughout the novel. How does faith function differently for her than religion? How does her spiritual life influence the choices she makes, even when those choices conflict with her emotions?

3. Betrayal During the COVID Lockdown

Malik makes a choice during the COVID lockdown that deeply wounds Lena. Was his behavior forgivable? Why or why not? What responsibilities do people carry toward those they love during seasons of fear, isolation, and uncertainty?

4. The Influence of Place

How does the setting of Cedar Hollow, Alabama shape the emotional atmosphere of the novel? In what ways do poverty, tradition, family expectations, and Southern culture influence the characters' decisions?

5. The Cost of Reconciliation

Who sacrifices more in the reconciliation between Lena and Malik? Is reconciliation ever fully equal, or does one person almost always carry a heavier emotional burden?

6. Love: Feeling or Decision

What does the novel suggest about love as a choice versus love as an emotion? Can love survive without discipline, accountability, and commitment?

7. Justice and Humanity

The novel explores incarceration not only as punishment, but as an environment that shapes identity and survival. How did the prison system affect your perception of Malik? Did it complicate your understanding of accountability and rehabilitation?

8. The Weight of the Past

Both Lena and Malik are haunted by earlier versions of themselves. Can people ever fully escape who they once were, or do the past and present always coexist?

9. Alternate Timelines and Destiny

Several interludes explore alternate versions of Malik and Lena's lives. Do you believe they were destined to reconnect, or were they simply two people shaped by unresolved longing?

10. Forgiveness and Boundaries

Is forgiveness always compatible with reconciliation? Can someone forgive another person deeply while still refusing access to their life?

11. Emotional Infidelity

Much of Malik and Lena's relationship develops emotionally before it becomes romantic. Do emotional affairs carry the same weight as physical ones? Why or why not?

12. Broken Systems and Personal Responsibility

The novel repeatedly asks readers to hold two truths at once: personal accountability and systemic failure. How successfully does the story balance those ideas? Did your perspective change while reading?

13. Identity and Survival

Malik creates versions of himself to survive prison, including "SouthKing74." How much of identity is authentic, and how much is adaptation to environment and trauma?

14. Silence, Shame, and Healing

Many characters avoid speaking openly about pain until it becomes impossible to ignore. How does silence function in the novel—as protection, weakness, survival, or something else?

15. Final Reflection

At its core, what do you believe *Cedar Hollow Promises* is truly about? Love? Redemption? Trauma? Justice? Survival? Which theme stayed with you most after finishing the novel?

Suggested Group Activity

Choose one moment in the novel where a different decision could have changed everything. Discuss:

- What alternative outcome might have followed?
- Would the characters have become better or worse versions of themselves?
- Does suffering deepen love, or simply expose it?

Closing Reflection

“Some people spend their entire lives trying to outrun one moment. Others spend their lives trying to redeem it.”

What moment defines Malik?

What moment defines Lena?