

Discussion Guide

Dear Reader, I am a devoted member of a book club. Please consider the questions here as a starting point for your own reading circle. These questions were developed by my readers, Jackie Philipp Reilly, a high school English teacher in Mishawaka, Indiana, and by Linnea Romhanyi, based in Massachusetts. A more in-depth guide is on my website:

<https://writenowjanetkelley.com/>

Consider writing to me on my website to share your questions and responses to the novel.

1. There are a multitude of dividing events in *Taint*: 9/11, high school senior year, Luke before the rape, Rebecca before and after. What events in your life have served as clear dividing lines?
2. In the “Cartridges” chapter Rebecca says “sometimes friendship costs even more than your life.” Is she being realistic, over-dramatic, or what?
3. In “Rebecca Alone” Rebecca says of Luke: “He will be tainted for the rest of this life.” Do you agree with her assessment of how people will view Luke? What exactly is the “taint” that she fears?
4. Talk about Rebecca’s mom. Is she as oblivious as she seems? What role do the adults play in his novel?
5. Is Rebecca’s love for Luke that of: A. mother figure, B. a sister, C. a codependent, D. a healthy friendship, E. a wannabe lover, F. other.
6. What term would you give Rebecca’s need to make Weston pay? A. justice, B. obsession, C. healthy need, D. loyalty, E. love, F. self-sacrifice, G. redemption, H. not-her-business, I. other.
7. Is Weston a product of his parents, his environment, or the time (2001)? Does the author give him an out by having his mother “abandon” him in death, and his father expecting him to be a mini-me?
8. In “The Final Exam” Rebecca says, “In this way I have freed him from Weston.” What word describes Rebecca: A. savior, B. conceited, C. self-absorbed, D. deluded, E. queen-bitch, F. self-sacrificing, G. righteous crusader, H. other
9. Do you see Rebecca as a hero or victim? What characteristics make Rebecca a literary anti-hero? Do you connect with her? Does the author intend for you to like Rebecca?
10. In the epilogue Rebecca says, “It is far too easy to do damage in the name of love.” Is this true to your own experience? To whom in the story was the most damage done?
11. Why does the author open the book with Luke’s account of the rape? How does this connect to the prologue of the book?
12. What do you think the author means to say by her choice of the very last line in the epilogue?
13. What do you think the author’s purpose was in writing this book? What ideas was she trying to get across?