

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

IN THE PINES

By Grace Elizabeth Hale

1. In the foreword, John Grisham talks about 'digging around the family tree' and says, 'For most white southerners of an age...Most of us know a family with a grandfather or a dead uncle who wore robes and burned crosses.' Where did you grow up? Was this statement surprising to you?
2. Grace's story begins with a family legend straight out of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Are there family legends about your ancestors (whether related/similar to Grace's or not)?
3. Racial segregation was a defining feature of the United States in the 1940s, and it endures today. Are you aware of racial segregation in your own neighborhood? How is it different from the time in which Oury Berry and Versie Johnson lived, and how is it similar? What effects of segregation, past and present, do you know of or observe in your surrounding community?
4. Despite white violence and the implementation of Jim Crow segregation, some Black families in the South were able to create flourishing communities separate from white people. How did they do this? What institutions did they build? What remains of those places today?
5. Grace's family story highlights the insidious connection between vigilantism and law enforcement in the midcentury American South. What relationship did they have at the time, and what relationship do they have now? How has the use of violence changed during that time?

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continued

6. Government and other institutional efforts to create and preserve official documents are affected by the same forces that affect the rest of American life. To cite just one powerful example, enslaved people were usually not named in US census records but were listed only by gender and age under the names of their enslavers. How has white supremacy shaped the archives and the materials available for genealogical research?

7. In addition to the official, government-level disparities in creating and preserving records referenced in question six, the degree to which individual families keep records and tell family stories varies greatly. How much do you know about your own family's history? What records, keepsakes, or oral traditions preserve that knowledge? Do you have plans for passing it on to the next generation?

8. Grace's book concludes with a meditation on systemic racism in the United States. Have you had conversations with your family or friends about this issue? How has it affected your family in the past, and how does it affect you today? What about forms of racial discrimination other than systemic racism?

9. Grace's family history offers one example of how white families have profited, economically or otherwise, from America's long history of white supremacy. What do you think white people should do to reckon with these advantages as individuals? As families? As a community?

10. Although the events recounted in *In the Pines* are largely focused on white and Black southerners, the reverberations from this era of American history have affected people from other racial, ethnic, and regional backgrounds. Where do you see this impact? In politics or other periods in American history? In your personal life or the lives of others? Do you see examples of communities taking action to change harmful customs, policies, narratives?