

Questions for Discussion

DAYS OF WONDER

CAROLINE LEAVITT

- In a novel filled with betrayals, violence, and lies, Leavitt uses the word “wonder” both in the title and throughout the book. Why do you think she did this? What was the wonder in the novel, and what would you say the wonder in your own life is?
- *Days of Wonder* delves into the difference between what people remember and what really happened. To emphasize this, the novel follows a dual timeline, tracing what was known in the past and juxtaposing it with what is uncovered in the present. Why do you think these characters put such trust in their memories? Did they have any other choice? Would you have?
- Ella writes down her darkest secrets and puts them in a wooden box. She controls what she wants others to know, and at the end, her decision about what to do with this box is meant to be surprising. Why do you think she was able to do that?
- Leavitt explores many different types of family in *Days of Wonder*. There is the depiction of an isolated Hasidic community; the portrait of a single mother, Helen, as she raises her daughter, Ella; and then there is the not-so-nuclear family that Helen and Ella create with Jude. What do you think the author is saying about the types of family we’re drawn to create?
- Helen is determined to raise Ella radically different from the way that she was raised. She later blames herself for all that happened, but do you think she was responsible at all? Would you raise your kids in a different way from how you were raised? Why or why not?
- Leavitt investigates the thorny question of what is really best for a child and why. What do you imagine the best outcome for Carla would be?
- Many characters experience violence in *Days of Wonder*—for Jude growing up, for Helen, and for Ella’s best friend, Marianna. What do you think the author is trying to say about violence? Why is it so often the case that victims find a way to blame themselves?
- There is an interesting duality in *Days of Wonder*: Jude grows plants that, if used in the right way, can be healing. But if used in the wrong way, they can poison. What other instances of duality do you see in this novel?
- Leavitt has said that almost all her novels pay homage to William Inge’s *Splendor in the Grass*, about young lovers whose lives are derailed by parental interference and class differences. How do you see this novel play with and subvert that theme?
- The characters in *Days of Wonder* are marked—by their traumatic childhoods; by their fractured relationships; and in the case of Jude and Ella, they are visibly marked by the matching hummingbird tattoos. What do you make of the divergence in the ways Jude and Ella come to view their tattoos by the end of the book?
- That night—the night of the attempted murder—many different things could have happened. What else did you imagine as you read?
- At its heart, *Days of Wonder* is about the bliss and terrible fallout of young love. Have you experienced this kind of frenzied affection?