

Dark Places Discussion Questions

by Gillian Flynn

Author Bio: (Fantastic Fiction & LitLovers)

Gillian Flynn is an American author, journalist, and television critic for Entertainment Weekly. She has written three novels, Sharp Objects, Dark Places, and Gone Girl.



Flynn, who lives in Chicago with her husband and two children, grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. She graduated at the University of Kansas, and received a Master's degree from Northwestern University.

Characters:

- **Libby Day** – 7 years old in 1985 when family was murdered. She survived. 31 years old now. Depressed, unmotivated, and a kleptomaniac.
- **Ben Day** – Libby's brother. In jail for murdering his mother and 2 of his sisters. 15 years old in 1985.
- **Debby Day** – 9 years old in 1985. Killed with an axe.
- **Michelle Day** – 10 years old in 1985. Strangled. Wrote in a journal every day.
- **Patty Krause Day** – Libby and Ben's mother. Knifed and shot in 1985. 32 years old in 1985.
- **Runner (Ronald) Day** – Libby and Ben's father. Ran off and left the family before 1985. Ruined the farm with debt. Divorced from Patty.
- **Calvin Diehl (Angel of Debt)** – Killed people so heirs would get insurance. He was paid by the victims.
- **Barb Eichel** – Wrote a book, "Devil's Harvest", on the Day murders focusing heavily on devil worship.
- **Jim Jefferys** – Accountant who managed Libby's trust.
- **Diane Krause** – Libby's aunt. Libby mostly lived with her after her family's murder.
- **Len the Lender** – Loan officer in charge of the mortgage on the Day's farm.
- **Crystal Palm** – Ben and Diondra's daughter.
- **Trey Teepano** – Devil worshipping friend of Diondra and Ben. Native American heritage.
- **Diondra Wertzner** – Ben's girlfriend. (Pregnant in 1985) Her alias is Polly Palm. She comes from an upper middle class family with neglectful parents.
- **Lyle Worth** – Leader of the "Kill Club". Asks Libby to come talk to the group.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The book was written in very short chapters, rotating from one character's point of view to another's, as well as flipping between 1985 and current day. Was it successfully done? Did it help or harm the story?

3. Did you find the characters in this story believable?
4. Libby is a liar, a manipulator, a kleptomaniac, and an opportunist. Did you like Libby as a character? Does she have any redeeming qualities? Do you think the author intended for her to be likeable? Are you able to empathize with her? If so, why?
5. Which secondary character did you like the best? Which did you like the least? Why? Did you change your opinion of these people as the novel progressed and more information was revealed about them?
6. Libby became famous as a victim—how do you think this strange fame affected her? Would she have been better adjusted had she never become famous?
7. Why has Libby ignored Jim Jeffreys’s advice to earn an income for so many years? Do you believe she feels she’s earned the money she’s been gifted by strangers? What is her attitude toward money?
8. Why do you think the author chose to set the murders on a farm? What images and themes does the heartland and farming evoke?
9. Like others Libby meets during her investigation, Barb Eichel seems pleased to have been contacted, having “wondered if you’d ever get in touch.” Why did Barb wait for Libby to come to her? Did Barb do enough to remedy the harm she thinks her book, “Devil’s Harvest” has done?
10. Patty Day frequently worries whether she is a good mother. What do you think? How does the book depict parents in general? Who do you consider the “good” and “bad” parents in the book?
11. The Kill Club is a macabre group obsessed with true crimes. Why do you think we are so interested in the murders of people we don’t know? Is the fascination exploitive, or does it serve some purpose?
12. What do you make of Magda, the middle-class Kill Club member so fond of Ben, and so callous to her own son? What does her character tell us, if anything, about the Kill Club and its members?
13. In considering the case of the missing girl Lisette Stephens, Libby thinks to herself, “There was nothing to solve . . . She just vanished for no reason anyone could think of, except she was pretty.” Do you think it’s strange that Libby considers this an uninteresting case? What does her attitude toward Lisette say about her view of her own family’s murder? Was there something to “solve” in the Days’ murder?
14. What do you think of Diondra’s relationships? Why is she attracted to Ben? Why is Trey such a constant companion? Do you think she was romantically involved with Trey?
15. Early in the book, did you think Ben was guilty of the murder? Does the author intend for us to doubt him? Is he guilty? Did Ben's punishment fit his crime?
16. Why doesn't Diane return Libby's phone calls? What does she mean at the end of the book when she says, “I knew you could do it . . . I knew you could . . . try just little harder”? Do you like Diane?

17. Why do you think Libby, at the end of the book, thinks twice before shoplifting? Is this reflective of a new attitude toward the world? How?
18. Libby does not tell the police about Crystal's involvement in her attack. Why does Libby give Crystal a pass? Is it the right decision?
19. Do you think Ben will find Crystal? What do you imagine their reunion would be like?
20. Gillian Flynn has written 2 other books. Will you read them?

References:

- Burn it or Buy It Books– <http://www.meetup.com/Burn-It-or-Buy-It-Books/messages/boards/thread/46918562#124877042>
- Gillian Flynn – <http://gillian-flynn.com/dark-places/discussion-questions/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/f/gillian-flynn/>
- Flavorwire – <http://flavorwire.com/453287/10-dark-and-twisty-books-for-gone-girl-fans>
- Goodreads – <http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/1017096-dark-places-fin-full-book-discussion>
- LitLovers – <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/17-elementary-fiction/8910-dark-places-flynn>
- RAforall – <http://raforall.blogspot.com/2012/05/what-im-reading-dark-places.html>

Gillian Flynn's Books

Sharp Objects (2006)
Dark Places (2008)
Gone Girl (2012)

If you liked Dark Places, try...

- Save Yourself – Kelly Braffet
 - What Was She Thinking? – Zoe Heller
 - And When She Was Good – Laura Lippman
 - In the Woods – Tana French
 - Down the Rabbit Hole – Peter Abrahams
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