

## A Madness so Discreet Discussion Questions

by Mindy McGinnis

### Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Mindy McGinnis's website)

Mindy McGinnis is an assistant YA librarian who lives in Ohio and cans her own food. She graduated from Otterbein University magna cum laude with a BA in English Literature and Religion.



Mindy runs a blog for aspiring writers at *Writer, Writer Pants on Fire*, ([writerwriterpantsonfire.blogspot.com/](http://writerwriterpantsonfire.blogspot.com/)) which features interviews with agents, established authors, and debut authors.

### Characters:

- **Grace Mae** – Insane asylum patient. Pregnant. Has a photographic memory. Will not speak. Sister Alice. Father is Nathaniel Mae a senator.
- **Phinneas Gage** – Railroad worker who had an iron bar blasted through his head and brain. Miraculously survived. Personality change after accident.
- **Senator Nathaniel Mae** – Massachusetts senator. Grace's father.
- **Dr. Melancthon Thornhollow** – A gentleman. Surgeon who performs lobotomies at the Boston Asylum. Interested in criminal behavior.

### Boston:

- **Boston Asylum Inmates** – Cracked Pat, Mrs. Clay, Fallstead.
- **Mrs. Clay** – Asylum patient. Protective of Grace. Her husband admitted her to get her lands.
- **Crooms** – Female nurse. Cruel to the inmates.
- **Dr. Falstead** – Patient in the cellars of the asylum. Smells illness on people. Former doctor.
- **Dr. Heedson** – In charge of the Wayburne Lunatic Asylum in Boston.
- **Miss Marie** – Nurse. Nice to Grace. Is going to adopt Grace's child.
- **Reed** – Guard in the cellars of the asylum.

### Ohio:

- **Madeleine Baxter** -- Grace's alias.
- **Beaton** – Chemist (pharmacist.)
- **Davey** – Police officer.
- **Elizabeth** – Patient in asylum. Believes "String" talks to her and tells her important facts

- **Janey** – Nurse at Ohio Asylum. Takes care of Grace and the other girls.
- **Nell O’Kelly** – Patient in asylum. Irish. Syphilitic.
- **Adelaide Thornhollow** – Dr. Thornhollow’s sister. Suffragette.
- **Anka Baran** – 1<sup>st</sup> victim. Kitchen worker. Polish.
- **Mellie Jacobs** – 2<sup>nd</sup> victim. Prostitute. Mrs. Jacobs’ (asylum patient) daughter.
- **Jenny Cantor** – 3<sup>rd</sup> victim. Kitchen helper in Pomeroy.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The title of the book is “**A Madness so Discrete.**” Why do you think that title was chosen?
3. This is classified as a teen historical mystery. How do you feel about that? Do you think the classification is appropriate?
4. How did you feel about the pacing of the book? Was it too slow, too fast, or just right?
5. What surprised you about the book?
6. Who was your favorite character? Who was your least favorite? Why?
7. In the Boston asylum, Grace refuses to talk. Is that a defense or is it insanity?
8. “To me the insane are simply people who have chosen not to participate in the world in the same manner as the majority.” (p 105). What do you think of Thornhollow’s assertion?
9. The lobotomies undergone in the Boston asylum seem to bring peace to truly demented and terrified people. If you only knew pain and terror, might the procedure be worth it? If you were Grace, would you consider having the procedure?
10. Thornhollow also says, “I think we’re all quite mad. Some of us are just more discrete about it.” (p 105) What do you think about this quote?
11. The Boston asylum was dark and dreary. Why do you think people believed the insane could be helped by the dark places? Do you think treatment was the real the main goal of the Boson asylum?
12. Grace agrees to never speak to anyone except Thornhollow. Is that too hard of a price to pay for being free of Boston and her father? Is the price worth it? Why or why not?
13. The Ohio asylum was bright and open and often hosted the townspeople on the grounds and at parties. Do you think the access the townspeople were given to the patients and buildings helped define the way the patients were looked at/ treated?
14. What do you think about the way Tess acted in the end? Was she insane? Was her final act an act of insanity or sanity?
15. How do you feel about Grace’s actions in regard to Beaton? Were they justified? Were there any other options? Do her actions indicate insanity?

16. What do you think about what happened to Senator Mae – the trial, the verdict, his placement? Right? Wrong? Was it justice?
17. When Thornhollow tells Grace that once it has been established that she is insane, then she will always be deemed insane. Grace then adds, “And, therefore, I am not human.” What do you think of this statement?
18. Did you find the end of the book satisfying? Why or why not?
19. McGinnis has written a total of 7 books. Will you read any of her other books?

### References:

- Fantastic Fiction <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/m/mindy-mcginnis/>
- Goodreads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/24376529-a-madness-so-discreet>
- Mindy McGinnis – <http://www.mindymcginnis.com/>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=70a93156-503b-4477-ac9d-af2c4a6a8a68%40sessionmgr4008&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10439454&db=neh>

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## Mindy McGinnis' Books

### Not a Drop to Drink

1. Not a Drop to Drink (2013)
2. In a Handful of Dust (2014)

### Given Duet

1. Given to the Sea (2017)
2. Given To The Earth (2018)

### Stand-Alone Novels

- A Madness So Discreet (2015)
- The Female of the Species (2016)
- This Darkness Mine (2017)

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### If you liked A Madness so Discreet, try...

- Jackaby – William Ritter
- A Drop of Night – Stefan Bachmann
- The Ever-After Bird – Ann Rinaldi
- Resurrection Men – TK Welsh
- Sporeville – Paul Marlowe