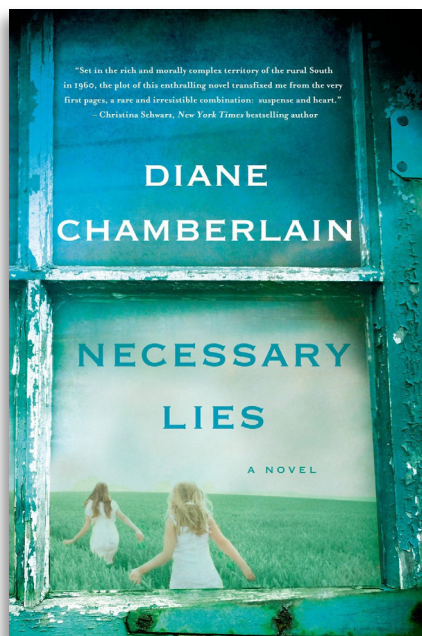


Necessary Lies Readers' Guide



About the book:

Bestselling author Diane Chamberlain delivers a breakout book about a small southern town fifty years ago, and the darkest—and most hopeful—places in the human heart.

After losing her parents, fifteen-year-old Ivy Hart is left to care for her grandmother, older sister and nephew as tenants on a small tobacco farm. As she struggles with her grandmother's aging, her sister's mental illness and her own epilepsy, she realizes they might need more than she can give.

When Jane Forrester takes a position as Grace County's newest social worker, she doesn't realize just how much her help is needed. She quickly becomes emotionally invested in her clients' lives, causing tension with her boss and her new husband. But as Jane is drawn in by the Hart women, she begins to discover the secrets of the small farm—secrets much darker than she would have guessed. Soon, she must decide whether to take drastic action to help them, or risk losing the battle against everything she believes is wrong.

Set in rural Grace County, North Carolina in a time of state-mandated sterilizations and racial tension, *Necessary Lies* tells the story of these two young women, seemingly worlds apart, but both haunted by tragedy. Jane and Ivy are thrown together and must ask themselves: how can you know what you believe is right, when everyone is telling you it's wrong?

Discussion Questions

- 1 Did the truth about Mr. Gardiner's involvement with Mary Ella surprise you? If not, at what point did you begin to suspect it?
- 2 Charlotte gives Jane a lot of reasons for why the Eugenics Sterilization Program is a good thing for both individuals and society. What are the reasons she gives and what were your reactions to them?
- 3 Various people throughout the story tell Jane that she is too emotionally invested in her clients, and Fred refers to her as "a loose cannon". Have you ever been in a situation where you had to balance emotional investment with professionalism?
- 4 Jane picks up on a lot of subtle but important details about the Harts during the extra time she spends with them. What key pieces of information does she glean from these interactions that she doesn't get from her formal interviews?
- 5 At one point Ivy observes that, "It was like the whole world was moving forward, taking Henry Allen with it, while I was holding still." How are the lives and actions of the various female characters influenced or restricted by their role in society as women?
- 6 Jane knows Lois for a short time, but it is a time when Jane most needs a friend, and Lois has a profound effect on her. Has there been someone who was only in your life briefly, but had a big impact on you?
- 7 How much of a role do you think the loss of Jane's sister played in her determination to help Ivy?
- 8 Jane's mother tells her, "Sometimes coloring outside the lines can cost you. Only you can figure out if it's worth it." Can you think of a situation from your own life to which this applies? Did coloring outside the lines cost you, and was it worth it?
- 9 How did you feel about the way the different characters' lives turned out, as revealed by Ivy at the end of the story?
- 10 What do you think you would have done if you were in Jane's position? Would you have put Baby William in foster care sooner, or not at all? Would you have told Mary Ella about her sterilization? Would you have gone as far as hiding Ivy in your home?
- 11 What would you have done in Ivy's position? Would you have gone with Jane? Would you have taken a different path?
- 12 Jane realizes that whether or not a person is perceived as intelligent has a lot to do with whether or not he/she is in a familiar environment. What examples of this do we see?
- 13 How do racial prejudices play a role in different people's assumptions, including Jane's, about what is happening between the residents at the Gardiner's farm?
- 14 Ivy realizes that she and Jane have more in common than she ever imagined. What are some similarities between them?
- 15 The social services system as depicted in this novel displays a hierarchy of power that trickles all the way from Jane's boss, Fred, through the different levels in the office and the different people on the Gardiner's farm all the way down to Baby William. What different levels of power do we see, and how are people at each level restricted in the power they have over their own actions and the actions of others?