

HEREAFTER Discussion Guide

1. Some readers have expressed a desire to know more about Jonah's background and to have a better understanding of his perspective in the story. How might the story be different if it had been told from his perspective, rather than Irene's?
2. Does Hereafter deviate from conventions of the paranormal genre? Of women's fiction? Of other stories about the afterlife? How might the story have been different if it had strictly adhered to genre conventions? Would you have preferred that version of the story to this one? Does Hereafter cover any new ground or add anything unique to these areas? What are some other books that Hereafter reminds you of? In what way is it similar to those books? In what way is it different?
3. Irene is not generally considered a sympathetic character. What makes her unsympathetic? In what ways might she have been depicted more sympathetically? How would that have changed the story?
4. How would you describe Irene's character at the beginning of the book? At the end of the book? Does she grow or change during the story? What about Jonah? How would you describe his character, and does he grow or change during the story?
5. How would you describe Irene and Jonah's relationship? Do you think this relationship is good for each of them or bad? Why?
6. Does Irene's reaction to being dead seem realistic? How do you think you would react in the same situation? What would it take to convince you that you were really dead? Do you agree with Irene's decision to cross over? Why? Which option would you choose—stay on earth as a ghost or cross over—if faced with the same choice?
7. Mrs. Boine and Amy are two very different people but both choose to remain on earth as a ghost. What is each woman's motivation for staying? In what ways are their motivations similar? In what ways are they different? Do you think their stated reason for staying is the real reason or is there something else behind each woman's decision? What about Scalper and Ernest? Why do they stay, and is each man's stated reason for staying the real reason?
8. How does Irene react to Ernest's declaration of love? Why do you think she reacts this way? Do you think Ernest is really in love with her? Do you think Irene believes he is? How does this understanding color your belief about why Irene reacts the way she does?
9. Why does Jonah disapprove so strongly of Irene's drinking? Why does she react so strongly to his disapproval? In each instance where this conflict arises, what do you think motivates them each to act as they do?
10. How does Jonah react when Irene finally reveals to him how she died? Why do you think he reacts this way? How do you think Irene expected him to react? In what way does her expectations of how he'll react affect her decision to stay on earth or cross over to the afterlife? How does his actual reaction affect her decision?

11. What are some of themes in Hereafter? Did any of these themes resonate more strongly with you than the others? Why or why not?
12. Overall, did you feel that Hereafter was a hopeful or a bleak story? Did it have a “happy” ending? Why or why not? What about Hereafter’s version of the afterlife—was that hopeful or bleak?
13. In what ways, if any, did Hereafter’s version of the afterlife match your own beliefs? In what ways did it differ? What did you find to be the most surprising about the version of the afterlife depicted in Hereafter? Were there any myths/beliefs that you were missing/not included?
14. How would you describe the writing style used in Hereafter? Did you like the style? If not, why? How might the story have changed with a different style? Did you have any favorite quotes or scenes from the story? What made that quote or passage stand out to you?
15. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was she clear about what she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
16. The story is set in present day Boston, Massachusetts. How important was the setting to the story? How did the setting color the story, if at all? How might the story have changed if it was set in a different location or in a different time period? In what ways did the story’s setting deviate from the real Boston? In what ways was it the same? How did these changes affect your enjoyment of the story (if at all)?
17. Which was more important to the story, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was there any foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book? Has the author foreshadowed things to come in the remaining books of the series?
18. How much of her own self or experience do you think the author injected into the story? Do you think there are any elements of the story that are real or is the entire story wholly invented from imagination?
19. Have you read anything else written by this author? How does Hereafter compare in terms of voice, tone, and style to the author’s other works?
20. Many reviewers have called Hereafter an uncomfortable read. What do you think they mean by this? Do you agree? In what way did the story make you uncomfortable? Did the story challenge any of your assumptions or change any of your views?
21. Hereafter is the first book in a series. What do you think will happen to the characters next? What do you wish would happen to the characters? How would you like to see the series progress? What, for you, would be a “happy” ending, given that Irene is dead?