

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS


THE TIME KEEPERS

By Alyson Richman

Topics and comments for discussion

1. In the author's note, Richman mentions how she shifted between past and present in the novel in order to evoke how we process memory. Discuss the passages that were written in the present tense in the novel affected how you felt as you walked in the footsteps of characters Jack, Bào, and Anh.
2. Grace and Tom Golden are not the typical married couple in Bellegrove. How do their backgrounds of differing faiths, cultures, and citizenship influence their own attitudes toward their new friendships with Jack, Anh, and Bào? Discuss the themes of outsidership versus insidership within a small, insular community. What connects the characters of *The Time Keepers* to their neighbors, and what separates them?
3. Jack, Bào, and Tom all have visible physical scars or injuries that make it impossible for them to hide their previous traumas, while the wounds of Anh's and Grace's painful pasts are not apparent to the naked eye. Do you think the actual visibility of scars affect certain character's experience, compared to those whose signs of traumas are internal or hidden?
4. The Golden Hours store is—in some ways—the beating heart of the novel. The store was originally founded by Tom's father, Harry Golden. How do Harry's wartime experiences, horological education, and meditations on time contribute to both his own healing and those who later work at the store? While Harry and Jack only meet once in the novel, what did you take away from their shared experience?
5. At the end of the novel, Grace describes time as not always following a linear path, noting that for some people, time radiated from a single epicenter, a point in time, where everything began and eventually returned. Discuss how Jack's enduring love for Becky defies the concept of time and how, despite its tribulations and setbacks, remains a force that sustains him through his darkest moments.

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6. Stanley Copes is one of the first people Jack meets when he arrives in Vietnam. He is described as being so innocent that he has never even drunk a bottle of beer. How is Stanley's lack of worldly experience and his purity viewed by his fellow platoon members? How does his death inspire and, also, change them?
 7. Maternal love is an important theme that resonates throughout *The Time Keepers*. Discuss how loss is entwined in both Anh's and Grace's respective maternal experiences, and how they find healing, purpose, and connection as they navigate the challenges of motherhood. Consider the impact of the maternal role played by women who are not the actual mothers of the other characters they are tending to. How does Anh transform as she takes on the role of Bảo's new guardian? How does Grace, already a mother to two girls, grow when Anh and Bảo come into her life?
 8. Sensory memories have long been considered one of the most powerful tools that can connect us to our past. Jack can find himself traveling back in time when he hears a certain song on the radio, just as Bảo can remember his mother's love when he inhales the scent of mangoes. How do certain tastes, fragrances, or melodies tether us to our loved ones, both past and present? What are things in your own life that help you remember certain people and place?
 9. The author shifts perspectives on how the Vietnam War is experienced by the various characters, not only by soldier and refugee, but also by family members who have lost a loved one. How did the shifting lenses of Jack, Bảo, Anh, and even Adele change your perspective on how you think about this devastating war?
 10. Buddy and Clayton represent a dark force in the community of Bellegrove. Discuss how their home environments might have impacted their development. Do you feel Buddy and Clayton's degree of evil was equal, or was one of them more malevolent than the other?
 11. *The Time Keepers* explores how unexpected friendships can often have the power to heal us. There are many different friendships that arise in this novel: Anh and Grace, Bảo



and Molly, Jack and Tom, Jack and Báo, and even Jack and Hendrix. How do these positive friendships help each character overcome their previous traumas? What connects each of these characters to the other, and what do they learn from these newly formed bonds?