

Discussion Guide

Healing of the Heart

1. Thomas has “grown up” throughout the series, and now his desire to study medicine has taken him from his beloved home and family in Shumard Oak Bend to Philadelphia. While he’s had a lifetime to build a reputation in Missouri, he arrives as a medical student with a “borrowed” reputation as Judge Pennypacker’s beneficiary. What do you think Douglass means in chapter two when he tells Thomas, “You’re in the gentry now”?
2. In Chapter 3, When Dr. Whitaker sexually harasses and assaults Teddy at the hospital, at first, she blames herself for not wearing a corset. Later, we learn that Mrs. Jones objects to Teddy’s job as a nurse because of the “intimate” contact she must have with her patients. Why do you think Teddy didn’t report the doctor who harassed her? Why do women today avoid reporting harassment and assaults?
3. Why is Thomas so comfortable in the home of Douglass and Harriet in Chapter 5? What is Thomas’s life goal? What is Harriet’s life goal? What is yours?
4. According to Jimmy in Chapter 8, what will be his most significant obstacle to graduation? Why does that idea worry Thomas? How do Emmaline and her friends view Jimmy and Thomas? Which do they think is more eligible? Why?
5. In Chapter 11, Douglass and Harriet do more than welcome Thomas into their home; they make him part of their family. As concerned family members, what questions do they ask to make sure Thomas is doing well? What advice do they give?
6. In a novel about moving forward and exploring new opportunities in education and careers, Thomas’s choice of verses for the New Year’s Eve service at the boarding house in Chapter 15 is especially poignant (Isaiah 43:18-19). How have you seen renewal in your life? How have you found a way in the “wilderness” or rivers in your personal “desert”?
7. In Chapter 18, Thomas worries about Gabe, which comes out as anger. What does Douglass say to relieve the pressure Thomas feels about not being able to help his friend? What encouragement does Thomas give Jimmy?
8. According to Dr. Whitaker in Chapter 22, reputation and image reflect character. However, he makes an exception for what is done “behind closed doors.” How does his philosophy reflect how he treats others? Why are so many people willing to cover for his inappropriate behavior?
9. In Chapters 25-27, how do Teddy’s friends help her after she’s attacked at the hospital? In Chapter 28, the stipulations Teddy requires as she accepts Thomas’s proposal are a garden, a horse, and a big dog. How would those things ensure her independence? Would asking for a chaperone be another bid at independence?
10. Throughout Chapters 29-30, what emotions do Teddy and Thomas need to sort through as they travel to Missouri? How is having an instant family beneficial to them?
11. Using the clues from the text, what did you think was wrong with Gabe? According to what we learned in Chapter 32, were you right? In what ways did the message in the service before the wedding relate to Gabe’s struggles?
12. Explain Teddy’s reaction to Thomas’s kiss and embrace in the root cellar in Chapter 31. In Chapter 33, what did Teddy’s pause mean before she kissed Thomas at their wedding?