



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

What Lies in the Woods

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *What Lies in the Woods*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *What Lies in the Woods*, we respectfully suggest that you consider waiting before reviewing this guide.

1. Naomi works as a wedding photographer, taking photos of joyful moments. Why do you think she chose this profession? Does she see these weddings as a kind of life she'll never attain, something she aspires to, or something else?
2. Olivia decides that it is time to tell the truth about Persephone, now that keeping Stahl in prison is no longer a consideration. Do you think she planned to tell the truth about what happened to Naomi as well, as Cassidy feared, or would she have continued to keep that part a secret?
3. A theme throughout the book is who owns the story of what happened that day, and who tells it. How have different people claimed the story, and with what goal? Does Naomi ever reclaim her story for herself?
4. Naomi says of the summer of the Goddess Game that the friends were starting to outgrow their games, and created a sense of desperation to hold onto their private world. How do you think this influences the girls' decision to keep Persephone a secret?
5. Naomi despises Oscar, and was victimized by him as a child, yet has repeatedly sought him out. What draws Naomi to Oscar, despite her feelings toward him?
6. Olivia's parents concealed what they believed happened in the woods for years in order to protect their daughter, but helped care for Naomi and continued to let the girls be friends. Why did they make the choices they did, and do you think they made the right choice?
7. Cassidy is responsible for Naomi's worst trauma, but she also helped Naomi in the intervening years, and Naomi credits Cassidy with her own ability to graduate and survive to adulthood. Why do you think Cassidy took on this role? Do you think she genuinely cared about Naomi, or was it for her own benefit?
8. Naomi's father is a hoarder, but he's left her room untouched. What does this say about how he deals with his emotions and the past? In what ways do you see this mirrored or contrasted in Naomi?
9. Ethan could have proven his father's innocence in Naomi's attack, but kept his silence. How are Ethan's decisions about keeping secrets parallel to Naomi's, or different? And how did his experience lead him to his career in true crime?
10. What drew Naomi, Cass, and Olivia to each other? Do you think the girls would have remained friends if this event hadn't occurred? Was Cass right that it kept them together?

11. Naomi appears to be on the path toward reconciliation with Ethan at the end of the book. Do you think their relationship could—or should—be repaired?
12. At the end of the book, Ethan says that “the final inch” of trust is faith. What do you think he means?