

The Echoes

Discussion Questions

1. How does the first line, “Esmé nearly escapes,” play into the themes of *The Echoes*? What does “escape” mean for different characters throughout the novel? Does anyone’s definition of “escape” change?
2. Our three protagonists, Esmé, Lily, and Beulah, represent three generations of women in the same family. What similarities do you see between them? What differences? In what ways are they representative of their generations?
3. Early on, Beulah seems worried by MayBelle’s vision, while Lily looks for logical explanations. Do you believe in “sight”? Who do you think was proved right in the end?
4. Family secrets, and their consequences, are a major theme of the novel. What secrets were the most damaging? Why? What do you think is the difference between “being *right*” to keep a secret, and having the “*right reasons*” for keeping a secret?
5. Why do you think it is Lily who takes it the hardest when she learns her brother, Roger—Beulah’s son, Hildy’s fiancé—had a child while he was overseas?
6. How has the war stayed fresh for these characters, in particular men like Benjamin, Hiram, and Chalmer? What about for the women who stayed behind?
7. How do the women in this novel—Beulah, Lily, Marvena, and even Sophia and Ida—approach motherhood differently? Are there any characteristics that Sophia and Ida, who could be considered members of the literary “bad mothers” club, share with the other mothers in *The Echoes*?
8. In the epilogue, Lily spies an owl who she seems to connect with her brother, Roger. Why do you think the author chose an owl to represent Roger? How does her internal conversation with Roger/the owl refute her own disbelief in MayBelle’s “sight”—or does it? What does her later sighting of a red-tailed hawk—an animal she associates with her deceased husband, Daniel—add to your understanding of Lily?

