

Discussion Questions for *The Last Runaway* by Tracey Chevalier

Next meeting- Tuesday, July 9 at 6:30 p.m.

1. "We're all from somewhere else. That's how Ohio is." --Belle Mills

Through Honor's own journey, the existence of the Underground Railroad and the runaways themselves, there is a constant sense of movement in this novel, suggesting home is not a permanent place and can be made and remade. Is Belle right that this is particular to Ohio or do you think this is a characteristic of America in general?

2. Silence in this novel seems to play different roles: communal religious silence at Meeting, individual reflection to which Honor attributes her own fine sewing, and there is also the Quaker community's more unsettling silence towards slavery.

Discuss the importance of its different roles in the novel. Does the Quaker community believe its own survival is dependent on staying quiet about slavery?

3. What are Honor's true feelings towards Donovan, and how do they change? Do you think her relationship with Donovan reveals aspects of her character that we don't see in her relationships with others?

4. When Belle Mills comes to visit Honor while she is sick at the Haymakers' farm, seeing her is, for Honor, like "discovering a sweet plum among a bowl full of unripe fruit." How important are the relationships Honor has with Belle Mills and Mrs. Reed? Is it significant that her strongest female relationships in Ohio lie outside the Quaker community? Would you say that female relationships would have been even more critical to survival in the 19th century than they are today?

5. Why do you think Honor feels she cannot go back to England? Do you think the horror of the journey plays a greater part than the heartbreak she ran away from?

6. When Honor comes across the applique patterns that are so common to quilting in Ohio, she finds them "cheerful" but "unsophisticated" when set against the accuracy and complexity of the patchwork quilts she is used to back home. Can this comparison have significance when considering the differences between England and the US at that time?

7. "As she peered into the dim woods, a raccoon scurried away, its humped back swaying back and forth...Grace would have loved to see a raccoon, Honor thought."

Honor spends much of the book learning how to cope with loss - of her intended husband, her sister, her homeland. Many of the other characters have their own losses to contend with. What does Honor learn from Belle, from Mrs. Reed, from Jack about dealing with loss?

8. How did *The Last Runaway* make you feel after reading it? Is this a hopeful story, both in the context of Honor's path and the path that America takes?
(Questions from [author's website](#).)