

Genealogy Discussion Guide

Suggested questions for a book club discussion or to think through on your own after reading *Genealogy*.

1. Elliott and Alice are kept apart by forces outside of their control and the fact that communication and travel in the early 20th century were too onerous to allow for long-distance love. Is their tragic love story a product of its time, or could modern couples similarly find themselves torn apart—despite cell phones, social media, intercontinental flights, and the like? What would a modern equivalent look like?

2. Is it possible to fall in love as quickly as Elliott and Alice did? Was their connection truly a lifelong love, or the kind of passion that would have fizzled if they had been able to stay together?

3. How do you think Elliott and Pearl's marriage played out? Do you think she knew she wasn't the love of his life? Do you think Elliott told Pearl about Alice?

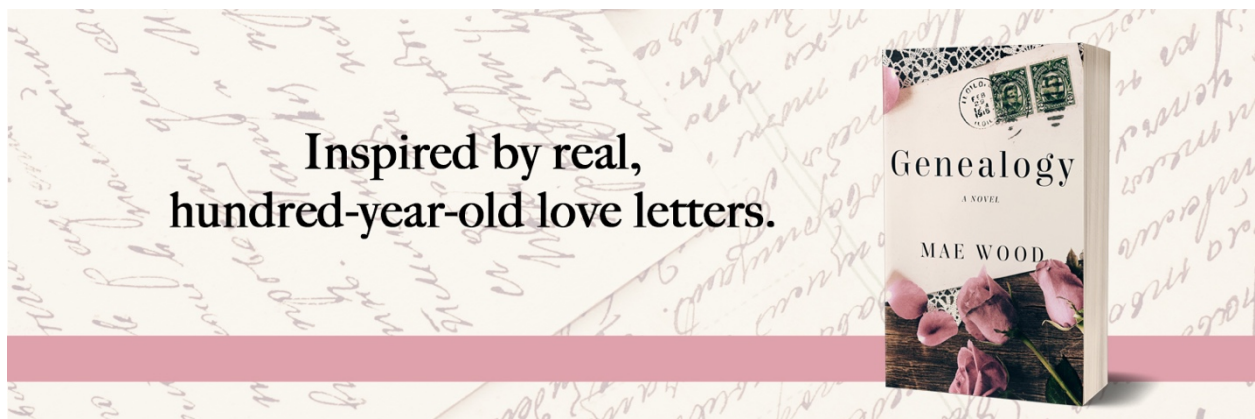
4. Ben's life seems to parallel Alice's in some significant ways. Like Alice, he lands in Seattle even though it is not his hometown. In addition, they both have a health issue about which they feel self-conscious. Considering the parallels between Alice and Ben, do you think that Ali is Ben's Elliott or his Fred?

5. Grammie states that she does not want to know what was in the letters between her mother and Elliott. Would you feel the same way upon finding love letters between one of your parents and a previous lover?

6. How was Fred able to be so sanguine about Alice's love for Elliott? Do you think he would have been upset if he'd seen Alice mouth "Always" to Elliott when they catch a glimpse of each other in New York? What does Fred's acceptance of Alice's past with Elliott tell you about his love?

7. Why did Ali think that she and Scott belonged together? What did the letters teach her about relationships that she didn't know before the start of the novel?

8. What is the importance of female friendship in the book? How do Caroline and Frankie help keep Ali and Alice grounded and how do they encourage them to dream?
9. If you were to name a child after a family member, what name would you pick and why?
10. If you were Alice, would you have made the decision to marry Fred or would you have continued to wait with the knowledge that you might never see Elliott again?
11. The author told the historical portions of the book in present tense and the contemporary chapters in past tense. How did this impact your understanding of the story? Why do you think the author made this decision?
12. Have you researched the life of any of your ancestors? Did you learn anything interesting or surprising? If you were to deeply research the life of one of your ancestors, whose life would you like to discover more about?



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Discussion Guide prepared with the assistance of Emily Guy Birken, avid reader, book club enthusiast, and author of *The Five Years Before You Retire* and *End Financial Stress Now*.