

An aerial photograph of a car driving on a snowy road at night. The car is illuminated from above, and its headlights are visible. The road is flanked by snow-covered trees, and snow is falling around the car. The overall scene is dark and atmospheric.

Ann  
Cleeves

THE  
DARKEST  
EVENING

The darkest nights can hide  
the deadliest secrets...

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. The title of the novel, *THE DARKEST EVENING*, is taken from the Robert Frost poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" which Holly quotes in chapter twenty-four. Why do you think the author chose this poem—and this title—to represent the novel? How do the themes of the poem and the themes of the story intersect?
2. In your opinion, what influence does setting have on the story? How is weather used to create atmosphere?
3. At the end of chapter one, Vera looks through the windows of the Brockburn estate, contemplating a "different, more glamorous life which would never be hers." Does knowing Vera's family comes from money change how you feel about her? The way her team feels about her? Do you think there are aspects of a life at Brockburn that she might have wanted, given the choice?
4. Speaking of the land around Brockburn, Joe thinks to himself, "these had always been borderlands, debatable lands, places of clans and shifting allegiances." How does this idea—of shifting allegiances and clans—play into the story at large and the relationships throughout?
5. Brockburn, a large, crumbling but still regal manor house, has very different effects on different people. How does Vera feel about it? Her team? What about the residents of the house themselves—Harriet, Juliet, Mark, and Dorothy?
6. The social worker, Helen, says to Joe in chapter nine "sometimes the parents are the problem." She is speaking specifically about the Falstones, but how is this true for the parents (and their children) throughout the book? What different representations of the child-parent relationship do we see?
7. Several of the character are involved in artistic pursuits—Lorna's painting, and Mark's plans to transform Brockburn into a theater. How does the theme of performance and artistry play into the novel?
8. Why do you think the author has chosen to narrate parts of the book through Juliet's eyes? What does Juliet's perspective reveal about herself, and the other characters?
9. Class divides play a big role in *THE DARKEST EVENING*. How do these divides—between the residents of Brockburn and their tenant farmers, between Dorothy and Juliet, Vera and her relatives—influence the story?
10. In what ways do you feel Vera is a product of her upbringing?
11. Secrets and the need for control seem to be closely linked in Lorna Falstone's mind. Why do you think keeping her life so private helped Lorna stay healthy after her sickness? Do you believe Lorna's murder was because of those secrets or because the secrecy was beginning to slip?
12. Despite dying at the very beginning of the book, Lorna is a huge part of the novel and we still continue to see her develop as a character. How did you feel reading about her and her life?
13. Were you surprised by the eventual reveal of the killer? How does the author use red herrings to point away from the murderer, while still providing the clues that lead to their unmasking?
14. If you've read other novels in the series, how do you feel Vera as a character has developed over time?