

READING GROUP GUIDE



01. *Lavender House* takes place in the Bay Area in the 1950s. How does the author establish the historical realities of the time for LGBTQ+ people, and moreover, how does this setting impact our early understandings of the novel's characters, most notably Andy?
02. Murder mysteries are known for secrecy, deception, and clues. How does the novel's primarily LGBTQ+ cast add to the murder mystery genre, specifically the characters' need for secrecy?
03. The novel's main setting, Lavender House, is described as both a haven and prison. For Pearl, for instance, it is a haven, while Cliff feels it is a prison. Why do various characters have such different experiences of Lavender House, and how does that influence who we believe killed Irene?
04. As Andy investigates the murder, he encounters both homophobia and LGBTQ+ allies in the most unlikely of places. How do these encounters impact Andy and his sense of self-acceptance throughout the novel?
05. Family, whether chosen, through marriage, or through blood, is a recurring motif within the text. What role does family play in advancing Andy's mission to investigate Irene's murder?

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06. At Lavender House, Alice is the only straight person who lives there, and as she claims, she believes that the LGBTQ+ family is a farce and that LGBTQ+ relationships are “perverse.” What do you think of Alice’s choice to remain at the Lavender House? Do you think that the LGBTQ+ members of the house have a responsibility to make Alice feel welcome, particularly as she is the biological mother of one of the LGBTQ+ house members?
07. From the beginning of the novel, we witness Andy’s suicidal ideations, even as they wax and wane across the novel. What role does suicide and violence—for example, Andy’s gay bashing in San Francisco—play in the novel, specifically as it impacts Andy’s character development?
08. How, if at all, are depictions of homophobia in the novel balanced with more hopeful representations of LGBTQ+ living and thriving? Does the author of *Lavender House* have a responsibility to represent queer history with accuracy, even as this is a work of fiction?
09. The novel concludes with parallel murders, and two matriarchs each kill in the name of family. How are these two murders similar and different, and which if either of these murders might be considered an act of justice?
10. The police complicate the novel’s plot as consistent antagonists. In fact, Andy has to confront his own complicity with abetting queerphobic immorality laws and “raids” on queer establishments. Are police antithetical to justice within the context of this novel? What implications might this parallel have for contemporary discussion of policing and police brutality in contemporary times?
11. *Lavender House* provides a snapshot of LGBTQ+ living that exists outside of mainstream society. What, if anything, has changed for LGBTQ+ people today? Do you believe that there would be a need for the Lavender House today? Why or why not?
12. While this novel centers LGBTQ+ history, it also surfaces issues related to class, gender, race, and more. These intersections of identity complicate the novel’s murder mystery. In what ways would this historical novel have to change if it centered the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ people of color or LGBTQ+ people with disabilities?

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