

Discussion Guide for *What We Wish For*

1. At the beginning of the novel, after finding a twenty-dollar-bill, Layla says that money “fixes things.” Do you think she’s justified in thinking this? In what ways is money not able to fix things for Layla?

2. At one point in the novel, Layla justifies her mom’s behavior by reminding herself that alcoholism is a disease. Do you think she truly believes that, and if so, why is she so angry, frustrated, and mortified by her mom’s behavior?

3. Layla doesn’t want her best friend Morgan to know that her mom’s an alcoholic or that she’s been living in a homeless shelter. Do you think her lies to Morgan are justified? Gabriel, on the other hand, is much more open about his circumstances. Why do you think that is?

4. Gabriel tells Layla that he tries not to measure himself by what people think of him. Layla admires him for that, but she continues hiding things about her own life. Do you think her behavior is justified?

5. Are there other characters besides Layla who you think act a certain way because they’re worried about how others see them?

6. James serves as a sort of spiritual mentor for Layla, and yet she betrays him by pretending not to know him at the Thanksgiving event. Were you surprised by this? What do you think of James’s reaction after she apologizes?

7. Aunt Tanya becomes a replacement mother figure for Layla. Do you think Layla truly wishes that Aunt Tanya had been her mom?

8. What do you think of Aunt Tanya? Is she likeable? Do you loathe her?

9. Layla is jealous of her cousin Celeste, who seems to go out of her way to be mean to Layla. Why do you think that is? Do you think Celeste is as snobby and spoiled as she comes across?

10. When Shauna walks out of rehab, Scott doesn't want to go looking for her, because, as he says, "She's an adult who made a choice." Do you understand his perspective?

11. Forgiveness plays a major role in the novel. In what ways do the characters forgive each other? Are there any times where you think the forgiveness is unmerited?

12. Secrets also play a major role in the novel. Obviously, Layla has secrets, but what secrets are the other main characters keeping? How have those secrets either helped or harmed the characters?

13. Do you see the title of the book as a warning (as in "Be careful what you wish for..."), or as something more positive?