



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE AGE OF INNOCENCE BY EDITH WHARTON

1. Wharton's title was an allusion to a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds depicting a five-year-old girl. What light does this cast on Wharton's view of the world she was chronicling? Do you think the title is ironic?
2. In the early outlines for this novel, Wharton played with the idea of having Newland break his engagement to May and marry Ellen; eventually the two separate and return to their own worlds. Why do you think Wharton, in the end, did not opt for this plot line? What, if she had, would have been different about the "message" of the book? What would you have ultimately thought of the characters?
3. What does Wharton reveal about Old New York and about Newland Archer through the characters of Cynthia Mingott, Ned Winsett, Julius Beaufort, Mr. Welland, and Janey?
4. Do you agree with Newland Archer that he missed "the flower of life"? What would this other life have been like, if he could have lived it without negative consequences to May or anyone else?
5. The Age of Innocence contains both satire and nostalgia for early twentieth-century New York society. What does Wharton find repellent about old New York? What admirable? How is the relationship between Newland and his son Dallas emblematic of the evolution of Old New York?

Questions from the Publisher.



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