

Reading Group Guide  
*The Promised World*  
By Lisa Tucker

## INTRODUCTION

From the bestselling author of *The Cure for Modern Life* and *Once Upon a Day* comes a riveting story of suspense about a literature professor whose carefully constructed life is shattered after the death of her twin brother and the unraveling of the secret they shared.

Since childhood, Lila has been closer to her twin brother Billy than anyone in the world. Then on a March afternoon, while Lila is working in her quiet office, her twin brother Billy points an unloaded rifle out of a hotel window across from an elementary school, closing down a city block. "Suicide by police" was obviously Billy's intended result, but the aftermath of his death brings shock after shock for Lila when she discovers that her twin was not only estranged from his wife, but also charged with endangering the life of his middle child and namesake, eight-year-old William.

## QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the novel's title (pg. 75). What is "the promised world" and how does it play into the aspirations of the characters? Does Lila, in the end, attain some form of redemption?
2. Describe the novel's structure. How did you feel about the changing voice of the narrator? How did Lisa Tucker's portrayal of women, men, and children differ?
3. How do the members of the Cole family respond to Billy's suicide? Do they grieve differently?
4. Discuss the role of luck in the novel. How does belief in the "Cole curse" affect the actions of Billy, Ashley, and Lila? How do Billy and Ashley's children view luck and superstition?
5. What does *The Promised World* tell us about the nature of marriage? How does Patrick's relationship with Lila change over the course of the novel? What sacrifices does Ashley make for Billy?
6. Describe the role of literature in the novel. What does it represent? What is the significance of the Cole family's interest in American literature? Are you familiar with the authors they study and discuss? How do they play a larger part in the novel, particularly Melville?
7. Early in the novel, Lila tells us that Billy would probably have considered her therapist a "hack." What is the role of therapy in the novel? Does attending therapy help or hurt Lila?
8. What are the repercussions of the parenting styles presented in the novel? Was William harmed by Billy's "challenges"? Was Ashley a bad or

- selfish mother? How did Barbara Duval affect both Lila and Billy's sense of self?*
9. *On Page 124 Lila recalls "Billy said it was not only the central theme of American literature but also the promise of the American dream—that we can reinvent ourselves however we want." Do you think Billy and Lila have reinvented themselves or are they simply hiding part of themselves from their new families?*
  10. *What aspects of Lila's life emerge during her trip to North Carolina? Who does she meet and how do they put together the puzzle of her past?*
  11. *How does Lila's relationship with Billy compare with Pearl's relationship with Billy? Do you see similarities in the different generations of the Cole family?*
  12. *The action of the book revolves largely round the revelation of secrets. What scene in the novel surprised you the most?*
  13. *What does the Duval house represent to Lila? How does the house add to the suspense of the novel?*
  14. *How would you have responded to Pearl's threat at the end of the book?*
  15. *What were you thinking as you read the novel's closing scenes? Which characters had changed the most, along with your impressions of them?*
  16. *What themes are woven throughout this novel? What is unique about the approach the author uses in bringing the Cole family to life? If you've read other novels by Lisa Tucker, do you see similar themes?*

#### **ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB**

1. *Read and discuss "The Piazza" by Herman Melville. Does reading this story enhance your experience of *The Promised World*? Do you think this story influenced Lisa Tucker? How?*
2. *Explore the works of other American Literature authors mentioned in the book (i.e. Thomas Pynchon, Nathaniel Hawthorne).*