

Book Club Questions

1. Empathy is a theme throughout the narrative of *The Grace of Crows*—not just empathy toward family, but also empathy toward strangers and even oneself. Discuss the significance of empathy in *The Grace of Crows* using specific examples.
2. Saylor’s main motivation is clear: She desperately wants to banish her anxiety. What motivates Brian, Brooke, Devin, and Erika? How do their different motivations conflict or align with Saylor’s?
3. How does the author’s use of setting enhance your understanding of the characters? What do you learn from the descriptions of interior spaces and outdoor surroundings?
4. The relationship between Saylor and her mother Erika is one of the most complex in the novel. Although Erika is judgmental and combative with her daughter, Saylor is able to see the fragility behind her mother’s narcissism. Discuss ways you have dealt with difficult loved ones—and have learned to see past their contentious exteriors.
5. Even though Billy only appears twice in the novel, Saylor’s conviction to connect with him again is an ongoing quest throughout the story. Discuss how this affected both the plot and you as the reader.
6. In chapter two, Saylor thinks: “Everyone dies in the end, and in billions of years, the sun will explode and melt the earth.” Saylor is aware that these thoughts are morbid, but they calm her by putting her fears in perspective. When you have faced emotional turmoil, what thoughts have helped you carry on?
7. Discuss Saylor’s epiphany about the “grace of crows,” what it means, and how she applies it to her life. In what ways do you experience Saylor’s understanding about the “grace of crows” in your own life?
8. Besides the crows, what other animal symbols can you identify and what aspects of emotional health or personal growth might they signify?

9. In the beginning of the novel, Saylor is aware that she suffers from anxiety. She knows her fears are irrational, yet she's unable to control them. Discuss how her struggles compare to your own emotional challenges.
10. Saylor's first encounter with her long-lost friend Billy sparks her journey toward self-awareness and healing. Later, her breakfast with a stranger spurs her on toward emotional health. Discuss ways in which someone from your past—or even the kindness of a stranger—has helped you in some profound way.
11. Discuss the beginning and end of *The Grace of Crows*. Why does it start the way it does? Did it end as you had expected? What kind of future do you envision for each character?
12. How did the novel expand your awareness? Did reading it help you understand a family member or friend better? Describe any personal insights that *The Grace of Crows* may have sparked.

Tracy Shawn

Tracy Shawn lives and writes on the Central Coast of California. She's worn many work hats (including waitress, floral designer, receptionist, vocational counselor, and core counselor at a psychiatric center for schizophrenic adults). Her educational background includes a master's degree in clinical psychology. Tracy enjoys incorporating her education and eclectic work history to heighten character development in her short stories and novels. Her writing has appeared in literary journals as well as print and online newspapers and magazines.

www.TracyShawn.com