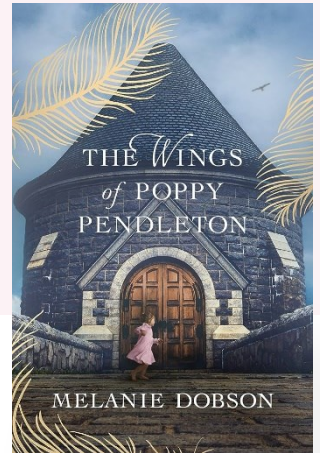




# LEADER'S GUIDE

## THE WINGS OF POPPY PENDLETON BY MELANIE DOBSON



*"Flames whip in fury, royal embers caged in brass.  
Soaring, searching, wondering, beating against the glass.  
Secrets, she whispers in the storm.  
Secrets, she boldly sings.  
But no one hears her voice, they only see her wings."*

### AMELIA PENDLETON

## THEMES

Redemption    Mystery    Journalism/Investigation    Right vs. Wrong    Legacy    Regret    Trauma

## HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Infidelity    Kidnapping and Human Tracking    Substance Abuse    Infant Loss    Prostitution  
Murder    Unplanned Pregnancy    Pre-Marital Sex (closed door/no sex scenes)    Mental Illness

## CHARACTERS

### 1907-1918

*Amelia Pendleton* is one of two Koster sisters who, after their English wealth dwindled, was sent to America to marry Leslie Pendleton. Coming into 'New Money', Amelia is shunned by New York's elite but is welcomed by politicians and gilded society. Amelia desperately desires to be a good mum to young Poppy, but amidst her failing marriage and isolation, she doesn't know how. Amelia has many secrets, and dreams of escaping her cage and flying free like her beloved birds. After Poppy's disappearance, Amelia becomes a recluse, eventually returning to the island where she begins a relationship with the groundskeeper Cade. Falling pregnant, Amelia hides away at the Ogdensburg orphanage, and upon returning to the island realises her hopes of becoming a family are dashed as Cade has married another. When confronted with her past secrets from England, Amelia surrenders her baby, Philip, to Cade and his wife Miriam, and retreats to England. However, the ship she is on sinks, and being one of the few survivors, she begins a new life as *Sister Sarah*, repenting from her past and living a life as a nun and nurse during the war.

*Leslie Pendleton* is a devoted father to Poppy but an unfaithful husband. Using opium and alcohol as a vice, his life is a sham, just like his 'Poppy's Tip-Top Tonic' the source of his wealth, which despite the harm it can cause, he knowingly sells to mothers for their babies. Dealing with opium is a dangerous business, and Leslie builds his Thousand Islands Castle in Koster Isle as a refuge and smuggling station. On the night of Poppy's disappearance, Leslie is murdered by consuming an overdose of opium.

*Penelope (Poppy) Pendleton* is Amelia and Leslie's shy daughter who prefers the company of birds over people. On the eve of her 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, she is stolen from her bed, never to be seen again by those who knew her. Years later, we met her as *Birdie*, daughter to the cruel and manipulative Ellie. The houseboat she lives on with Ellie and Olivia is often visited by men paying for the company of the two women. Birdie wishes to fly away and leave the destructive and abusive environment. When Ellie and Birdie leave America for England, on the same ship Amelia was on, Ellie drowns and Birdie begins her new life in the care of Sister Sarah. She trains alongside her aunt to become a nurse at Leek Island and marries William Townsend, the boy who rescued her on the sinking Empress ship. Her life is redeemed, and she grows into a faithful and kind elderly woman who helps children in need.

*Cade Riddle* is the groundskeeper at Koster Isle. During the winter when Amelia returns to the island after Poppy's disappearance, he engages in a relationship with her. Believing himself 'below' her socially he never proposes, but upon her return the following year with infant Philip, he realises that he has fathered a child with her. Cade is full of regret that he was never told about his son, but has already married Miriam in Amelia's absence and is unable to right the wrongs he has done. When Amelia and Philip's lives are threatened, Cade and his wife Miriam agree to raise Philip as Amelia flees to England.

*Philip Ridell* is Amelia's son who is left in the care of his father Cade and adoptive mother Miriam. After returning from WWI he is a broken man and turns to drugs in his grief. Philip fathers a child, Chloe, and in a devastating car accident kills himself and Chloe's mother.

*Eleanor (Ellie) Koster*, is Amelia's sister and Poppy's biological mother. After being admitted into a sanatorium in England against her will, her baby was removed from her, and Amelia raises poppy as her own. Ellie is malicious and cruel and capable of great evil. Upon her release from the asylum, she seeks Poppy and takes her, believing Poppy to be her property.

*Olivia and Pierre* live on the houseboat with Birdie and Ellie. Olivia is kind to Birdie and tells her about a loving Father in Heaven, but after Pierre's brutal murder (by Ellie), Birdie never sees Olivia again.

*William (Will) Townsend*, is the bellhop who saves young Birdie during the sinking of The Empress of Ireland. After fighting in the war, he is left with a crippled mind and arrives in Leek Island for care. Given into the capable hands of Birdie, he is lovingly nursed back to health. The two heal alongside one another and are married, living a happy life together on Wellesley Island.

## 1992

*Chloe Ridell* is Cade and Miriam's granddaughter. After the death of her grandmother, she lives alone with her two dogs on Koster Isle, in the shadow of Poppy's castle. Chloe has blacked out much of her childhood, only remembering snippets of her broken life before moving to Koster Isle with her grandparents. To keep their legacy alive, Chloe gives everything she has to maintain the sweets store and their cottage. When young Emma arrives unannounced on her island, Chloe feels compassion for the child and can relate to her in more ways than one. Despite her initial hesitation, Chloe agrees to investigate Poppy's disappearance with journalist Logan, believing it will help her figure out Emma's story.

*Grandpa Cade Ridell and Nana Miriam* raised Chloe as their own after her father's death. Although they were faithful Christians and beloved in the community, Chloe soon realised that her grandparents were keeping many secrets about her father's past, and her connections to missing Poppy Pendleton.

*Emma* is a young girl who mysteriously washes up at Koster Isle during a storm. Carrying Amelia Pendleton's journal, she seeks refuge with Chloe on her island. Although Emma is incredibly clever, brave and resourceful, she is reluctant to share her past. It's not until her past comes looking for her that Chloe realises Emma has escaped a terrible fate of human trafficking. Chloe eventually adopts Emma and provides a safe home for her on Koster Isle.

*Logan Danford* is a journalist trying to put together all of the pieces of Poppy's story. After the death of his infant son and a failed marriage soon after, Logan is intent on making wrongs right. He is a faithful Christian and wants to bring good into the world, in Jesus' name. With his help, Chloe can remember and engage with her past, and together they discover what happened to Poppy Pendleton.

*Mitch Yancy* is a corrupt Border Patrol officer who comes looking for Emma. He is trafficking children and drugs and is eventually imprisoned for his crimes.

## STORYLINE

*The Wings of Poppy Pendleton* is a time-slip mystery spanning 85 years with the rugged Thousand Islands of New York as the backdrop. In 1907 Leslie Pendleton built a castle on Koster Isle, a gift for his daughter Poppy, and wife Amelia, purchased with his wealth made from selling an opium-infused tonic for children. But dealing with opium is dangerous and on the eve of Poppy's fifth birthday, the legend of the murdered millionaire and his missing daughter is born.

In 1992 Chloe Ridell dwells on Koster Isle in her late grandparents' cottage, under the shadow of the ruined castle. Chloe has never thought too much about Poppy, the castle, or the mystery surrounding her disappearance, not until young Emma washes up on her island during a storm, with her only possession being a notebook that links her to the Pendletons.

As Chloe desperately seeks answers, Logan, a journalist determined to figure out what happened to Poppy, shows up at just the right time. In the hunt for Emma's true identity and family, Chloe unravels secrets that her grandparents kept and soon discovers that she, Emma and Poppy are somehow all connected. Chloe and Logan must work together to uncover the past and save Emma's life.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. What was your favourite part of this time-slip mystery? Did you prefer one timeline over the other?

### TALKING POINTS

Dual-timeline stories are becoming increasingly popular. The separate storylines, which form a larger narrative, add cliffhangers and suspense at the end of each chapter as we journey back and forth between times and characters. We may have enjoyed one timeline more than another because of:

- 1907; The mystery surrounding Poppy's disappearance, the history during this time period or following the redemption of Amelia's life and mistakes.
- 1992; Chloe and Emma's developing relationship, Logan and his backstory, the way the story wrapped up with Birdie and the discovery that she was alive.

# 2

Q. The disappearance of Poppy is the main narrative in the story. Poppy's story, beginning with her abduction, is one of abuse and heartache. However, when we meet Birdie as an elderly lady, she is free from her past. What made her transformation possible?

## TALKING POINTS

When Sister Sarah and Birdie begin again after the Empress' shipwreck, both women can heal, grow and flourish alongside one another.

- Sister Sarah allows Birdie to be free from her past by not revealing her identity as a Pendleton or Koster heir.
- Working as nurses on Leek Island, both women dedicate their lives to the help and healing of others.
- The love of William helps Birdie to heal and recover from her deep trauma.
- Birdie uses her pain to compel her to be a safe space and help others in trouble.

# 3

Q. Amelia feels like a caged bird trapped in an unloving marriage in the fortress of Koster Isle. Amelia makes many poor and selfish decisions with complicated consequences. When does she realise her mistakes? How does God redeem her life and past errors?

## TALKING POINTS

When Philip's life is threatened by Ellie, Amelia realises that she has acted selfishly for most of her life. Surrendering Philip into Cade's care is her first selfless act. As she begins her life again as Sister Sarah, she dedicates her future to the Lord, caring for injured soldiers, and begins a steady presence in Birdie's life.

# 4

Q. Chloe's heart breaks for Emma and her circumstances. How are Chloe and Emma similar? How are they different?

## TALKING POINTS

Chloe and Emma are both neglected by their parents, the people who should love them and seek to protect them above all else. Both Chloe and Emma arrive on Koster Isle hoping to start again, while keeping their past a secret.

- While Emma is bold and courageous, Chloe is hesitant to delve into her past and fearful of what she might uncover.
- Both Emma and Chloe struggle to trust others.

# 5

Q. Do you think it was right for Cade and Miriam to keep so many secrets from Chloe? How did Cade's letter enlighten Chloe and help her to heal?

## TALKING POINTS

Cade's letter helped Chloe to understand her father's neglect and drug abuse. While it does not excuse his actions, knowing her father was traumatised from the war helps Chloe to understand that she did nothing wrong and her father's wrong actions were from a place of brokenness and not deliberate cruelty. Chloe was also able to forgive Cade for his lies, understanding that the Castle and Pendleton held painful memories for himself and Miriam and that Cade had already sought God's forgiveness, and therefore she could forgive him and move forward in healing also.

# 6

Q. Nana Miriam is a selfless and wise woman. How did her wisdom guide Chloe through life's storms?

## TALKING POINTS

Miriam's wisdom taught Chloe to listen to and tune into those "God Whispers" which directed her and saved herself and others many times.

Other wisdom and selfless moments from Miriam include:

- The advice that, "Only when you cleared away weeds... could a heart heal."
- Miriam role models steadfast love and loyalty to Cade, despite his mistakes and relationship with Amelia.
- Miriam demonstrates compassion towards Philip and raises him as her own.

# 7

Q. Good vs. Evil is a theme in the novel. Which characters made decisions for good, and which made intentional decisions towards evil? How is this different to making mistakes?

## TALKING POINTS

Characters who intentionally chose to act evilly for personal gain:

- Ellie; murderer, kidnapping, intended murder, abuse
- Leslie; drug smuggling and selling opium for children's consumption, vice of alcohol
- Mitch; Human trafficking and drug smuggling, attempted murder of police officers.

Characters who made mistakes had regrets and allowed God to redeem their messes, ultimately choosing to make decisions for the good of others.

- Amelia and Cade acted recklessly during the winter Philip was conceived, but both allowed God to redeem their mistakes.
- Logan's failed marriage and the tragic loss of his son compelled him to try and right the wrongs in the world.
- Birdie's hardship spurred her on to love others well.
- Chloe's past compelled her to do right by Emma and investigate her past, even though she was scared and didn't want to open past wounds.

# 8

Q. Read the poem *God of the Open Air* by Henry van Dyke on page 290. How can beautiful literature and poetry help us to heal? If you have a favourite poem, share it with the group.

## TALKING POINTS

*God of the Open Air* by Henry van Dyke;

*Thou who hast taken to thyself the wings  
Of morning, to abide,  
Upon the secret places of the sea,  
And on the far islands, where the tide  
Visits the beauty of the untrodden shores...  
To thee I turn, to thee I make my prayer,  
God of the open air.*

# 9

Q. "No one knew what went on sometimes in families. The good and the bad. No one could possibly understand except those who had lived through it" (p186). Can you relate to this quote? If you're comfortable, share a time when your family has endured a time of trial.

## TALKING POINTS

Our families often endure hardship, suffering, trials and loss, and sometimes the grief is kept hidden and kept in the dark. Often what we bring into the light can be healing as we move forward.

Answers to this question may vary and could include;

- Times of suffering; poor health, terminal diagnosis, loss of loved ones.
- Times of trial; wayward child, enduring persecution because of your faith, relationship breakdown.
- Times of discouragement or confusion; job/career loss, failure, disappointment.
- Times of exhaustion or feelings of failure; early days of motherhood, burnout, and overcommitments.

# 10

Q. "God had begun mending their brokenness into something beautiful like only a good Father could do" (p328). What part of this redemption story moved you the most? Do you feel like the light in the story outweighed the darkness?

## TALKING POINTS

Although there is much wisdom and redemption in *The Wings of Poppy Pendleton*, there are also many heavy themes and at times it can feel dark. Allow a space to discuss how the book impacted each individual in the group, and if anyone has felt overwhelmed by the content, pray for them and direct them to a health professional who can support them.



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