

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Patience is only partly right when she tells William he's spelled the name of his ship wrong. *Bellewether* is, in fact, the original Middle English spelling of the word *bellwether*. Apart from its literal meaning—a sheep that wears a bell to lead the flock—the term can also apply to a predictor or harbinger of something. When asked about the meaning of the book's title, the author said, "In the book, the ghost is a literal bellewether, leading Charley toward the truth, while the divisions forming between Britain and her colonists, and among the colonists themselves, are a bellewether of the coming revolution." What bellewethers have you experienced in your own life? Did you know they were harbingers at the time? Or only when you looked back after a significant event?
2. The legend of Lydia, her French officer, and the ghost that haunts the Wilde House grounds turns out to be wrong in several respects. Did you see the twists coming? Were there any stories passed down in your own family that turned out, in the end, to be not entirely true?
3. Did you guess who the ghost was? Do you believe in ghosts? Have you ever encountered a ghost in your own life?
4. Charley and Lydia are both struggling to hold their families together through difficult times. Who is the person in your family who holds everyone together through difficult times? Have you ever had to play that role?

5. Both the past and present storylines feature multiple generations interacting. Do you like this in stories? Do you have difficult or colorful characters in your family? What is the best thing about your own family dynamics?
6. Did you relate more to the historical story line or to the story line in the present day? Why?
7. The use of two viewpoints in the past—Lydia’s and Jean-Philippe’s—means that sometimes we see the same scene from two different perspectives. Have you ever talked to someone about an event from the past and found that they saw the event completely different from how you did?
8. Charley’s feelings for Sam, like Lydia’s for Jean-Philippe, develop over time. Have you ever been in a relationship or friendship that had a slow build like this? What was it like at the beginning? What is it like now?
9. Tyler uses charm to get his own way, and Jean-Philippe tells us de Brassart is “a man who used his charm the way another man might use his sword, and with as deadly an effect.” Is there anyone in your life who is charming in this way? How do you deal with them?
10. Even though the Seven Years’ War was arguably the first true world war—drawing in every great European power, with battles on five continents—relatively few novels are set in this period. Did you know much about this war, before you read *Bellewether*? What was the most interesting thing you learned? If you could go back and visit any historical period, which one would you visit?
11. Was it a surprise to you to learn that Canada had slavery?

Had you ever heard about the trials and burnings in New York in 1741? Why do you think this history isn't widely taught in schools? Do you know about other events or historical truths that aren't taught widely?

12. The system of parole of honor worked well enough in the eighteenth century, but it would still have had its difficulties for those involved. What would have been the most difficult part for you, as either a prisoner or a host?
13. Is Lydia and Jean-Philippe's romance the only example in the book of love and greater understanding overcoming prejudice and intolerance? Can you think of any others? Do you feel this has a particular resonance for our modern lives?