

pandemonium

by LAUREN OLIVER
DISCUSSION GUIDE



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Sequel to DELIRIUM

Bestselling Author of BEFORE | FALL

LAUREN OLIVER

ABOUT THE BOOK

After a harrowing escape from Portland, Lena—reborn as a warrior but grieving—finds herself living in a community in the Wilds and training for the resistance. She smuggles herself into New York City to infiltrate *Deliria*-Free America, a sinister organization that seeks to force the cure at an ever-earlier age. Lena hardly expects that her work will lead her to be kidnapped with Julian Fineman, the poster child of the DFA, and she certainly doesn't anticipate developing feelings for him. As she struggles yet again to escape, she learns hard lessons about trust, freedom, and how to construct an identity. She also has to answer the all-important question: In a world where she is still able to make the choice, who will she choose to love?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Lena mean when she says she is being born again? She tells readers that the new Lena is “not born all at once,” but rather “step by step—and then, inch by inch” (p. 6). Why is that? Who else in the story is born again? Are they reborn by choice, by necessity, or both? Can you give a real-life example of this type of dramatic rebirth?
2. Lena shows obvious signs of trauma and shock after escaping Portland. What other characters exhibit those signs? Describe the feelings of grief and survivor's guilt that many of the people in Raven's brood seem to share. How do they cope with their distress? When Sarah tells Lena that “you get used to it after a while” (p. 45), what do you think she means? Does time heal, or does it numb?
3. Lena is touched by the compassion of the rat-man and others who live belowground. Can you think of other examples of selfless love in Lena's world? What about in your own life?
4. Raven refuses to acknowledge her past: “There is no before. There is only now, and what comes next” (p. 21). Describe Raven. Why would she refuse to talk about the past? As it turns out, what does it mean for her to live in the “now” and “what comes next”? Contrast the choices she and Lena make throughout the story.
5. In Lena's world, what does it mean to be fully human? Are the people living in the cities human? What about the Invalids or the Scavengers? Once she reaches the Wilds, Lena says at times that she feels like an animal. She also says that priests and scientists agree that “at our heart, at our base, we are no better than animals” (p. 113). Do you agree? If that were true, could the cure change it?
6. Lena uses poetic language to describe her feelings: “I do want. I'm not even sure what, exactly, but the want is there, just like the hate and anger were there before. But this is not a tower. It is an endless, tunneling pit; it drives deep, and opens a hole inside me” (p. 285). Choose a passage from the story and think about what analogy is being used to describe Lena's emotions. Have you ever felt similarly? What words or images resonate most with you?

7. The DFA says that it is “sometimes necessary to purge the weak ... in order to evolve to a better society” (p. 51). Thomas Fineman also says that he is “willing to accept the consequences” of forced vaccination and is “brave enough to sacrifice a few for the good of the whole” (p. 54). What was your reaction as you read that? Look up the terms *eugenics* and *social Darwinism*. Can you find historical examples of similar reasoning?
8. The scientific community assures the public that the cure is safe for adults, but says it “is not yet safe for children” (p. 101). Thomas Fineman and the DFA say this is incorrect and that the authorities are just being “overly cautious.” What do you think? Do you see any parallels to the current day? In our society, who decides when things are medically safe? What gives you confidence in taking prescription drugs, undergoing surgery, etc.?
9. There are moments when Lena and the other Invalids seem to be seeking retribution: “If you take, we will take back. Steal from us, and we will rob you blind. . . . This is the way the world is made now” (p. 147). Lena doesn’t seem happy about it, though. What are the Invalids seeking, if not always retribution? What gives them the right to change life for people living in the cities? Can you think of any possible future for Lena’s world where “civilization” and the Wilds coexist and people are free to choose between them? Or are the two doomed to conflict?
10. Lena says that “hatred is a high tower,” and, in the Wilds, she starts “to build, and to climb” (p. 166). What does Lena hate? Does this hatred change over the course of the story? Is it related to who and what she loves?
11. Did your thoughts about Thomas Fineman change at all after hearing Julian’s story about his brother’s death? How do you think Thomas became who he is? What are his intentions? What does he care about, and what is he really seeking?
12. Describe what you think it is like to be a parent in Lena’s world. Two very different parents appear in this story: Lena’s mother and Julian’s father. Is Lena’s mother who you would have expected after reading *Delirium*?
13. In a moment of anger, Lena lashes out at Julian: “I’m an Invalid,” she says. “We lie” (p. 198). When and how does trust develop between Lena and Julian? What do you think happens in the moment after the story ends, when Julian meets Alex?
14. The first time Lena sees adults fight is in the freedom of the Wilds. How does this relate to Lena’s statement that “a world without love is also a world without stakes” (p. 74)? What else is lost in a world without love? Can you see any advantages to a world where people are seen as “values, benefits, and liabilities, numbers and data” (p. 139)? Which type of world would you choose, and why?
15. Lena gives us the image of a rising tide: “Droplets, droplets: We are all identical drips and drops of people, hovering, waiting to be tipped, waiting for someone to show us the way, to pour us down a path” (p. 56). What do you think will happen with the future of the Resistance? What do you predict for the next book in the story?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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LAUREN OLIVER, a graduate of the University of Chicago and NYU's MFA program, is the author of *Before I Fall*, *Delirium*, and *Liesl & Po*. She also co-owns Paper Lantern Lit, a book development company. Lauren lives and writes in Brooklyn, New York. You can visit her online at www.laurenoliverbooks.com and on Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace.

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