



BELONGING

Reader's Discussion Group Guide

“Jill Fordyce is a sensitive and beautiful writer and a novelist to watch.”

—Malena Watrous, author of *If You Follow Me*

In **BELONGING** (Post Hill Press; January 30, 2024), **Jill Fordyce** makes her fiction debut with a coming-of-age story about love, loss, and faith; the meaning of family and true friendship; and the hold the past often has over the present. Set in Bakersfield, California, the novel centers on Jenny Hayes, a resilient young woman trying to break free from the wounds of a painful childhood, while also remaining deeply connected to the generations before her, and the place she called home.

The following questions are intended to provide the common ground for a shared reading experience—for reading groups, discussion groups, or other topical forums.

How does the town of Bakersfield, California, its music, and immigrant history become part of this story?

The theme of belonging to a place, a faith, a family is central to the novel. As a reader, does this theme resonate with you? How does it relate to your own life?

When Bakersfield experiences the epic dust storm and Jenny comes down with valley fever, how does this experience change Jenny's life?

Are there any metaphors you see from both the dust storm and the valley fever, as they relate to Jenny's life?

Nonna and Uncle Gino take care of Jenny as she is growing up. What does she learn from them?

The parents of Billy, Jenny, and Henry play an important role in this story. Do their families influence the choices they make?

What advice do these friends offer each other at critical times in their lives?

Billy and Jenny declare their love for each other as teenagers and meet up again some years later. What challenges do they face as they reclaim their love for each other?

Janice, Jenny's mother, is a difficult person. Does that cause Jenny to doubt herself? How does that show up in the story?

How does Jenny's father react to Janice, her demands, and being a father to Jenny?

Henry and Billy are the two most important people in Jenny's life, but they are so different. What is it about each of them that appeals to her?

Why is it that Billy doesn't really know how important Henry is to her? Is she keeping that a secret? If so, why?

When Uncle Gino is dying and finally gives Jenny some important letters, he asks for forgiveness. Why does she grant that wish?

How do the letters free Jenny and help her to regain her sense of belonging?