



*Discussion
Questions*

1. Early in the novel, Juniper considers:
“What, she wondered, made a neighborhood *good*? To her parents, *good* seemed to mean there were mainly other people like themselves” (pg. 54). What do you think makes a “good” neighborhood, and is Oak Knoll one of them? As new houses are built in older, existing neighborhoods, do you think that changes the feel and culture of a place?
2. For Valerie, “tending her plants was her therapy” (pg. 7). What about the natural world does Valerie take comfort in? What does Valerie’s dying oak tree come to represent for her? With that in mind, do you think her lawsuit was reasonable?
3. Of her new neighbors, Valerie acknowledges: “I basically judged them from the second the chain saws started, and that bothers me. I try to



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give everyone a chance, or how can I complain when people prejudge me?" (pg. 27). What assumptions do these two families make about each other? Which of these assumptions do you consider to be racist or classist?

4. Who should shoulder the blame for the chain of aggression between these neighbors? What actions could have been taken by either family to tame the tension?
5. The Greek chorus makes the reader a part of the story, and complicit in the action. How did that affect your reading? Who did you believe the "we" was in the book's narration?



6. “How many nights in the past few years had Valerie waited up for her son, praying that he and his friends not be stopped by the police?” (pg. 19). In what ways are both Juniper and Xavier taught to protect themselves? How do each of them handle the sociocultural limitations that are put on their bodies?

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7. Describe what Juniper’s early life was like when Julia was down on her luck. How does that experience shape what is expected of her, and the choices she makes (including purity vows, employment options)? What kinds of messages does she receive about the kind of woman she should become?
8. “As far as Juniper could see, Julia was all in for all of it. Between Blakely and



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New Hope, she was making certain her daughters were groomed into angels on earth” (pg. 40). In what ways did you view Julia as a victim or as an accomplice to Brad?

9. Did you recognize your teenage self in any of the young characters in this novel? Like Juniper and Xavier, did you also share a strong sense of desiring social justice?
10. “She wanted her daughter to value herself more than she, Julia, had done as a teen, wanted her to see chastity as the thing that made her the boss of her fate” (pg. 96). What did you think about this notion that a woman’s “purity” is her “superpower”?

11. The book club in the novel is reading and discussing Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. How does that classic novel echo or amplify the action in *A Good Neighborhood*?
12. What scenes with Brad did you find especially upsetting to read? How does Brad justify his desires and urges, and did you understand where he was coming from?
13. How does the media coverage and news cycle contribute to Xavier's fate?



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