

# WHEN LAMBS CRY

## *Group Study Guide*

### WHEN LAMBS CRY - Group Discussion

#### **Summary:**

It is summer again, and Joshua Tanner has turned ten. He has big plans for summer adventure with his best friend, Marvin, but one thing is standing in his way – his newly acquired brother, Caleb. In Joshua's opinion, Caleb is a spoiled city kid who needs to be taught a lesson. But when Joshua sets out to teach Caleb a lesson, he ends up leaving him in the hands of escaped convicts. In the meantime, Terrence and Allen are adjusting to prison life, while Ron is determined that he will escape to a new life.

#### **Discussion Questions - Referenced Chapters Are In Parenthesis**

1. The title of the book is *When Lambs Cry*. Why do you think the author chose this title when there are no actual lambs in the story?
2. In your opinion, is there any crying in the story? If so, who is crying and in what way? (You could possibly make a chart to answer this question.)
3. In chapter one, why is Joshua having a nightmare?
4. How do you think Joshua would have reacted if he had actually gotten to see his mother on the day she dropped Caleb off?
5. Why do you think Sadie Belle was being extra kind to Caleb? Give an example of her kindness toward Caleb.
6. In chapter two, why is Basil taunting Terrence?
7. How does Terrence respond to Basil?
8. Compare the old Terrence from the first chapter of *The Lie That Binds* with the new Terrence.
9. Why is Basil angry about religion?
10. Why is Marvin telling Joshua about his father's DUI and other problems (*Telling Secrets*)?
11. Make a comparison between why Ron wants to escape and why Basil wants to escape.
12. Why is Caleb lying about all the places he has seen in Chicago?
13. Compare the difference between how Terrence and Allen each feel about Jay.
14. Allen is proud of his little brother, Timmy, while Joshua hates his little brother, Caleb. Give your opinion on why this is so.
15. What is strange about Allen asking Terrence to pray for his family?
16. How is Terrence able to cope when he doesn't have any family to come visit him while he is imprisoned?
17. When reading chapter seven (*Mischief and Mayhem*), would you say that Joshua has a sense of humor? Why or why not?

18. What do you learn about Marvin's personality in chapters seven and nine (*Mischief and Mayhem/Vengeance Is Mine*)?
19. Who is Ruth, and what role does she play in the story?
20. Ruth was named after her aunt's favorite Bible character. After doing some research on Ruth in the Bible, do you think Ruth lives up to her name?
21. Since some prison inmates only committed minor crimes, they are allowed to perform off-site jobs. Do you think this is a wise decision? Why or why not?
22. How did Basil plan to escape prison? Did his plan work, and how?
23. With the availability of the internet, do you think it is possible to hide a prison record if you ever get one?
24. From reading chapter eleven (*Am I My Brother's Keeper?*), how do you think Sadie Belle handled her money?
25. From reading chapter twelve (*Innocent Inmates*), how do you think Ron and Basil felt about the crimes they had committed? Give a reason for your answer.
26. Do you think Basil is guilty of the crime that he is accused of committing? Why or why not?
27. What lesson can you learn about using drugs from chapter twelve (*Innocent Inmates*)?
28. In chapter thirteen (*The Rod of Correction*), what do you think was the name of the book that Marvin's teacher had given him to read over the summer?
29. Why was Basil angry at his father?
30. Why did Basil say that nobody in their right mind would want to be a pastor? Why do you agree or disagree with him?
31. Compare and contrast Basil's father with Ron's father (from *The Lie That Binds*).
32. Compare and contrast Basil's father with Joshua's mother.
33. Compare and contrast Ruth and JaLisa.
34. Why wasn't Basil happy that Ruth helped them escape?
35. How did Ruth's attitude toward Basil change during the escape?
36. Why did Ruth call her neighbor "Mr. Clean"?
37. What did Ruth daydream about?
38. Why do you think Ruth merely daydreamed about a new life rather than doing something about it?
39. Compare Ruth's daydreaming about a new life to Basil's daydreaming about a new life (*Utopia*).
40. What is ironic about Ruth calling her town a safe town?
41. Why did Joshua's hatred toward Caleb intensify after Caleb told him about his mother knowing that he almost

drowned at the pond? (*A Thin Line Between Love and Hate*)

42. Why was JaLisa offended when Joshua compared her to his own mother? (*WIC and Welfare*)
43. Why did Joshua dislike JaLisa?
44. Why was JaLisa determined to finish school and go to college?
45. Why might finishing school and going to college be a harder accomplishment for JaLisa than for other kids her age?
46. Where did Ron and Basil plan to escape to and why?
47. Why did Basil want to disassociate himself from Ron after they escaped?
48. Why one do you think would be more likely to commit another crime had they escaped - Ron or Basil? Why?
49. How did Terrence end up in a fight at the correctional facility?
50. What is an exorcist, and why does a title in the novel bear that name?
51. How did Joshua trick Caleb in the woods?
52. How did Ron feel when he saw his daddy's auto shop closed down?
53. Why did JaLisa follow Joshua into the woods?
54. Who did Ron think Caleb was when he first saw him?
55. Why did Ruth refuse to help dig up the backpack?
56. Why do you think Ron surrendered to the police while Basil tried to run?
57. Do you feel sorry for Basil, Ruth, or Ron? If so, why?
58. Do you think that the town will consider Joshua a hero this time?
59. How do you think the incident in the woods will affect the following characters - Joshua, Caleb, and JaLisa?
60. Describe how you think Ruth's family will react to what she has done.

## WHEN LAMBS CRY - Suggested Class Activities

### 1. **Character Profile Posters -**

Separate students into groups. Assign each group a different character from the story. Have each group write a profile on the character. The profile should consist of the character's name, age (or approximate age), physical description, personality, family demographics, role in the story, what they like or dislike about the character, and a short description of what they think this character would be like one year after the timeframe of the story. The students may also draw a sketch how they picture the character physically.

### 2. **Magazine Feature Story -**

Have the students imagine they are writers for a major magazine, and they have been given the assignment to do a feature article on crime in small towns. Have them choose one or more characters from the story to interview for their articles. The article should read and look like a regular magazine article. Again, sketches may be used, or the students may wish to use real pictures of their own to include in their stories.

### 3. **Extra! Extra! Read All About It! -**

This activity is similar to the magazine feature story, but in this activity the students are working for their local newspaper instead of a major magazine. The students are reporters for their local newspapers. Give them the choice between the two topics: "Basil Jamerson III - A Preacher's Kid Gone Bad" or "Ruth Jones - Villain or Victim?"

### 4. **Write An Epilogue**

At the end of the novel, both Joshua and Caleb tells Sadie Belle that they are satisfied with her being their mother. Have your students write an epilogue where Joshua's and Caleb's mother comes to get them.

### 5. **A Cinderella Story**

Ruth can almost be characterized as a Cinderella in this story. Have the students write a chapter which includes Ruth and her family at a family reunion to show how they perceive that Ruth is treated in the novel.