

1. Discuss your first impressions of the main characters. Who did you like best initially? Which, if any, surprised you by the end? Whose transformation was most complete?
2. The Kellaway and Butterfield families, though very different, also have some similarities. Compare and contrast the parental relationships, as well as the sibling relationships, within the two families.
3. Throughout the novel, attention is paid to the differences between city and country, with Maggie and Jem each representing their home turf. Which does Chevalier portray more sympathetically—city (Maggie) or country (Jem)? In what ways?
4. Why do you think Chevalier chose to set her novel in 1792? Why not a few years earlier, or later?
5. William Blake's first two appearances in the novel are quite striking—first, in his *bonnet rouge* on page 19, and then when Jem and Maggie spy on him having sex in his backyard (page 27). What significance does this have for him as a character? What did you expect of him after these prominent glimpses?
6. Before reading *Burning Bright*, were you familiar with Blake's work? How did it color your experience of the novel?
7. Read and discuss the poem from which the book's title is taken, "The Tyger." (An excerpt is on page 275.) What is its significance in terms of the novel and the characters? Why do you think Chevalier chose a phrase from this poem for her title?
8. Two of Blake's most famous works are *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. How do those works relate to the characters of Jem and Maggie?
9. Life in Georgian times was unpredictable and dangerous—several characters lose family members, and fire is a constant threat. How does Chevalier use this precariousness to enrich the story? What role does economics—and class—play?
10. Reread the conversation about opposites on pages 71–73, and discuss your own take on the subject. Which character do you agree with most?
11. *Burning Bright* is set in and around Astley's Circus, a popular real-life attraction in 1790s London. How does Tracy Chevalier use the circus as a character? What does it represent?
12. On page 86, Philip Astley tells Blake that the two men are in the same business: "We are both dealers in illusion." In what ways is he correct, and how is he wrong? What purpose do these two characters serve in the novel?
13. On page 199, Laura Devine tells Maisie, "What you want is not worth half the value of what you've still got." What did she mean by that? How might it resonate with Maisie later in the novel? And for the other principal characters?
14. Beginning on page 216, Maggie tries exceptionally hard to preserve Maisie's virginity, eventually turning to William Blake for help. Why does she go this far when nobody else seems to care?
15. How much did you know about the political background of the story? Would you have signed the loyalty oath like the one on page 236? What did it reveal about Dick Butterfield's character when he signed? About Thomas Kellaway's when he refused?
16. When it is finally revealed on page 261, how does Maggie's experience on Cut-Throat Lane color her character? Why does Jem react the way he does?