



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

"L.M. Elliott uses the pen of a journalist and the heart of a storyteller to create a masterful, page-turning, razor-sharp commentary on a past that looks eerily like our present. A book that made me feel, think, and most importantly, hope."

—Sharon Cameron, NYT bestselling author of *The Light in Hidden Places*

"Creatively layered, thoughtfully crafted. Fans of politics and complex moments in American history will be sucked into this fresh and compelling book."

—Kelly Jensen, author of *Here We Are: Feminism for the Real World*

### **An ALA Rise Feminist Book Pick A YALSA Best Fiction Pick**

***(Starred Review) Shelf Awareness:*** Astounding. Elliott does a superb job of placing her readers squarely in 1973 Washington, D.C. giving readers a breathtaking month-by-month view of this extraordinary, electric time. . . Characters are nuanced and realistic. An uncommon title that covers new territory in a novel way.

***SJL:*** Patty Appleton has a front-row seat to one of the most scandalous political dramas in American history. As one of the first female congressional pages, Patty not only witnesses President Nixon’s dirty political tricks but also finds herself at the intersection of a divided nation. Patty’s personal journey becomes a mirror of the time’s ideological battles. She wrestles with opposing influences—her conservative parents (unshakable Nixon supporters) and her feminist friends, who challenge the era’s patriarchy—and the challenge of sorting through half-truths to find the reality beneath. Each chapter begins with a photo-essay of relevant historical clippings, political cartoons, and news photos.

***VERDICT:*** The skillful blend of historical facts, relatable angst, and profound social commentary makes this a gripping must-read.

***Booklist:*** The story’s intensity is ensured by sharply drawn secondary characters, powerful mother-daughter relationships, and the relevance of the political and personal issues explored.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did the real historical images included in the prologue and before each chapter inform and affect your reading?
2. Early in the book Patty declares “I haven’t experienced any discrimination or sexism” (p. 10). Is this true? How does her perspective change over the course of the book?
3. Partisan tension and conflicting beliefs are seen throughout the book. In Patty/Simone; Dot/Aunt Marjorie; fellow Congressional pages Abe/Will. How does it affect their relationships? Do you believe “issues about equality and fairness transcend political partisanship” (p. 23)?

4. Many of the novel's young characters are influenced by music from artists like Carole King, Aretha Franklin, Carly Simon, Helen Reddy, and more. What role did music play in the book and in that historical time period? Have you heard the songs mentioned in the book? What do they mean to you? (The author posted [a companion playlist](#) on her website & Spotify.)
5. Simone frequently quotes Gloria Steinem. In one instance she says, "feminism is about our being equal as we are, not having to become them" (p. 64). What role does feminism play in the characters' lives? What does feminism mean to you?
6. How and why did Patty and Simone's relationship change during the book?
7. Patty keeps returning to the image of Maureen Dean silently sitting behind her husband during his testimony. What does Maureen symbolize to her? Does that change?
8. What does it mean to "follow the truth wherever it leads" (p. 186)? Who demonstrates this? Who does not? What tactics do they use to hide the truth and maintain the status quo? Do you see examples of "gaslighting," defined as psychological manipulation used to gain power or control over others, by sowing doubt in their own judgment and intuition?
9. How do Abe and Will broaden Patty's perception and affect her character development?
10. During Patty and Simone's conversations, they reference *Ladies Home Journal*, *Esquire*, or *Ms.* magazines. Patty feels uneasy after reading a profile on Marilyn Monroe, "Hollywood's tragic angel of sex" who inspired "all manner of dreams" in a man, fulfilling them with "a whispery voice and a smile that promised 'take me.'" (pp. 197-199; 212-216; 252-254.) What impact do these articles from very different media have on the characters' concepts of self, sexuality, body image, and romance? Do you see similar cultural messaging today?
11. The novel has many undercurrent themes, including the question of consent—from the democratic principle of "consent of the governed" (a government's right to power is justified and lawful only when the public is informed and consents) to gender-based violence (sexual, physical, mental, and economic harm inflicted in public or private—i.e. power and control over someone else using threats, discriminatory laws, coercion, manipulation, or denigrating labels and language). How do these things affect Patty? Women today?
12. "Politics as usual" is frequently invoked to excuse unethical or illegal acts or deflect truth (p. 256). What does political loyalty mean to you? Can politics and truth coexist?
13. Both Patty and her mother grow a great deal. How do their journeys align? How do they differ?
14. The two major historical threads throughout the book are the Watergate hearings and the progress of the ERA. How do these events connect thematically? Other significant realities depicted in the novel are 1973's lingering racism and bitter divide over the Vietnam War. Julius and Will have important backstory and emotional challenges dictated by these issues. How do their narratives add to the overall story?
15. In the epilogue, the author says: "Here we are, 50 years later, in similar storms" (p. 325). What similarities between 1973 and today do you see reflected in the novel's events?

For more on the novel, 1973's political debates, the women who fought for (and against) the ERA, and Laura's other works, please see: [www.lmelliott.com](http://www.lmelliott.com) or @l\_m\_elliott.