

Book Club Questions for *Wish You Well*

Questions taken from: http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides_W/wish_you_well1.asp

1. Baldacci's eloquent use of language in *Wish You Well* transforms readers to another time and place - a time when America's agrarian existence was beginning to transform into industrialization and a place where the land was the heart and soul of the community. What are Lou and Oz's first impressions of the southwest Virginia mountains?
2. Louisa Mae Cardinal believed that one must be willing to listen and learn from the land. How does Louisa Mae help begin this process for Lou and Oz? What does Louisa Mae mean when she states that the mountains have "a lot of secrets?"
3. Eugene and Diamond shared a unique relationship. Why would Eugene permit Diamond to refer to him as "Hell No" and be so adamantly opposed to others using the name? What similarities did the two share that might have given them a common bond?
4. Social and or economic poverty was prevalent in the southwest Virginia mountains of 1940. What are the complex characteristics of Louisa Mae's "love-hate" relationship with the mountain? How does this affect the assimilation of Lou and Oz to their new environment?
5. Children have difficulty sometimes learning to trust others when they have lost a loved one. How and why does Lou come to trust Cotton Longfellow?
6. Baldacci makes several references to threats to the land. What are the references and how do the characters react to them?
7. During the early part of the 20th century industrialization claimed various American rural landscapes for the sake of "economic gain and modernization." What affects of industrialization did Baldacci express in this novel and how did the characters react to them?
8. In the novel the mountains seem to be living beings. Why is that important in the overall context of the story? What point is Baldacci attempting to convey?

9. The character of George Davis is, on one level, totally evil. Seen in another light what are some of his attributes that might be applauded by society today and what does that say about our priorities and the types of people who are richly rewarded under our economic system?
10. What messages about organized religion and faith in God do you find in the novel?
11. Is the courtroom battle at the end of the novel simply a fight for land rights or does it have more to do with competing ways of life? Is a similar fight and transition going on today?
12. Louisa Mae Cardinal believes she would never be as happy anywhere else as on the mountain even though she has never seen any other places. Can such a view be valid and rational, or must one experience other places before she can reach such a conclusion?
13. Southern Valley officials made the argument that the importance of preserving the mountains should not take precedent over using its resources to ensure economic prosperity for people. At what point, if any, does that argument fail?
14. Cotton Longfellow remarks that people often spend much of their lives chasing dreams they know will probably never come true, and also that that tendency may be part of what makes us human. Do you agree with that statement, and if so, why?
15. Does living off the land make people more practical, or are practical people drawn to making a living from the land? What other lessons can be drawn from your answer to that question?
16. Lou and Oz learned much about their family's past in the novel. The conveyance of such familial knowledge is a major theme in the story. Do people today care about the past as a guidepost to the future? Should we place more emphasis on oral histories, and lessons learned from our ancestors? Or is the future so different now that the past holds little value for us?