

A Gathering of Ghosts Reading Group Guide

1. *'You can stamp and frown as much as you please, Mistress, but this is a battle I am going to win.'* Prioress Johanne rules the priory with a firm hand, but her authority is challenged with the arrival of Knight Brother Nicholas. To what extent is this book about power?
2. The well sits at the heart of life in the priory – and is central to the mystery of the story. What did you make of the plagues? Were you surprised by the identity of the blind boy? Can we find an earthly explanation for the strange happenings?
3. *Great grey clouds rose up, one behind another, like walls of stone, but a beam of dazzling sunlight, thin and straight as a golden arrow, slipped between them.* What did you make of the wild and remote Dartmoor setting? How does the myth-laden landscape frame the story?
4. Compare the three first-person narratives – Sorrel, Johanne and Morwen – with the chapters that take place at the priory. Does this affect how we perceive the three different women? And what impression do we get of Nicholas?
5. Discuss the theme of survival in the novel, and how it shapes the actions of the characters.
6. *I saw black Ankow galloping across the moors on that skeleton of a horse, with his hounds baying at his heels. I knew he was hunting souls.* How can we understand the tensions between the different models of faith and tradition in the book – the conflict between pagan and Christian beliefs, magic, wisdom and ancient lore?
7. How is the role of family presented in the novel? Think about Kendra and her daughters, the home Sorrel leaves, and the bond between Johanne and Sebastian. Is family something we're born into, or something we choose?
8. Why do you think Todde wants to help Sorrel? How does fear influence the way people relate to each other?
9. *Not all of our noble sisters enter the order entirely by their own choice, though they must swear that they do.* Discuss the sisters' different reasons for 'choosing' a life of servitude.
10. *A Gathering of Ghosts* is set against the backdrop of a terrible famine which caused widespread poverty, desperation and displacement of thousands of ordinary people as they were forced to travel across Europe in search of food or better conditions elsewhere. What parallels can we draw with our world today?