



Book Club Discussion Guide

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
A Note to the All-Wise, Wonderful Book Club Discussion Leader	3
Story Insight Questions	4
Questions about Characters	6
Genre Questions	10
Topic and Theme Questions	12
Relationships	13
Questions Best Asked over Drinks	16
The “Four L” Book Club Process	17
Legal, Copyright, and Newsletter Info	19

A Note to the All-Wise, Wonderful Book Club Discussion Leader

If you're reading this, you've either just found a Tangential Route Generator sphere and need the instruction manual ... or you're getting ready to lead a book club discussion of *Parallel Lines*, the world's only LGBTQ+ sci-fi romcom taking place in alternate-world versions of Atlanta, Georgia.

Let's hope it's the second scenario ... because this is the official *Parallel Lines Book Club Discussion Guide*.

The questions in this guide will help you and your fellow group members have the best possible discussion of the book. As with most things in life, the discussion will go even better when you pair these questions with lots and lots of wine ... or chocolate ... or chopped raw veggies .. or whatever cranks your personal tractor.

Not even Davina would try to make people answer all the questions in this guide — especially not in one sitting! For best results, look over the various sections, find the four or five questions you like best, and then proceed to amaze everyone with your skill as a discussion leader (and your deep insights). Or you can always cut the questions into strips and have people draw 'em from a hat.

Remember: there are no right answers to these questions. Instead, just go for honest answers. Answer dishonestly, and Anna Denise may punch your face in.

And remember: even when Thomas was hopping from life to life, he took a little time to stop and smell the roses. And roll around in the sheets with his lovers. And eat a Crave burger. The point is this: **the most important thing is to have fun.**

Finally, in the worst case scenario, you can always grab a Tangential Route Generator and run the same session of your book club over and over again in an infinite number of parallel worlds until it turns out just the way you want it to. Just remember to be asleep by midnight to lock in the outcome you prefer!

Thomas and his friends thank you very, very much for being a reader and a leader. Let us know how it goes!

Story Insight Questions

What did you know about *Parallel Lines* before picking it up? To what extent did the book conform to your expectations? How did it defy them? Did anything about the book surprise you?

What is the “pace” of this book? Is it a slow read? A quick read? What tricks does the author pull to control your perception of the “speed” of the book?

If the author has an agenda in writing this book, what would you say that agenda is? What argument is he making? What message is he trying to send? What advice would you say he might give? What aspects of his argument or message would you agree or disagree with?

The first chapter of a book often sets up the main character’s “everyday world.” What does “Chapter 1 - Bottoms Drink Gin” set up as Thomas’s everyday world? What is his life like? What has happened recently? How is this “everyday world” revealed?

What lessons do you think Thomas learns from each of the lovers his journey reunites him with?

How often and when does the Providence Bakery truck appear? What might be its symbolic meaning?

As the story unwinds, what are signs that each tangent is becoming more unstable than the last? How does the universe itself work against Thomas’s success?

What would you say is the climatic moment in the book? How has the rest of the story prepared Thomas for that climatic moment?

How do you feel about the ending of the book?

What music would be on the soundtrack for this book? What songs are played in the course of the story? What about the music or lyrics might have motivated the author to choose these songs? What would be the theme song, or what song would play over the credits for the streaming series?

If you’re from, have lived in, or have visited Atlanta ... what were some of your “I’ve been there!” moments in this story?

Would you recommend this book? Why or why not?

Who would you say *Parallel Lines* is for? Why?

If you could ask author Mark McElroy one question about this book, what would that question be? Why? What do you think his answer would be?

What's a passage that you highlighted, or that you felt resonated with you? Do you have a favorite quote or paragraph?

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, what rating would you give this book and why? How has the discussion of the book today changed the way you would rate it?

Questions about Characters

Pick a character from this story and tell us what you have in common with them.

Pick one character — Thomas, Les, Anna Denise, Miguel, Carter, Davina, Ed, or Leo— and talk about how they change or evolve over the course of the book.

Who would you cast in *Parallel Lines*, the online streaming series?

Who is the most tragic character in the book? Why do you think so?

Who is the book's most practical character? Smartest character? Most ethical character? Most surprising character?

Among Hope, Les, Anna Denise, Miguel, and Leo ... who do you like best, and why? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Who would you most like to have as a friend? As a mentor? As a lover?

In what ways are the various character names symbolic?

Thomas

What would you say is Thomas's "gift" or unique talent that helps him survive the story?

How does Thomas evolve over the course of the book? What behaviors does he leave behind? What behaviors does he embrace? What evidence is there that his transformation is permanent?

In what ways could Thomas be considered his own worst enemy? How does he set himself up for relationship failure? What habits work against him? What kinds of mistakes does he tend to make again and again?

Davina tells Thomas, "The truth will set you free." What truth does Thomas come to possess? What does it free him from? What role does truth play throughout the book?

Initially, Thomas accepts Tevin's invitation to sneak off and have sex in the woods. What does Thomas's response to Tevin say about Thomas as a character? What forces are at play in Thomas's life that might make this offer attractive? How do you feel about his acceptance of that invitation?

Les

What is it that Thomas likes most about Les? What do you like or dislike about him? What are his most admirable traits? How did you feel when you learned he was married?

At one point, Anna Denise remarks that “Les is pretty much Les, whatever world he’s in.” Which of your friends do you think would be pretty much the same, whatever world they appear in?

Is Les’s initial relationship with Thomas cheating? Why or why not?

Les claims to love Anna Denise and Thomas equally, for different reasons. Is it possible for one person to love more than one other person equally, at the same time?

Anna Denise

What three words would you use to describe Anna Denise?

How do you feel about Anna Denise? What aspects of A.D. are admirable? How does her presence impact the story?

How do you feel about Anna Denise as the “straight female character” in the book? What are her attitudes about sex and sexuality?

How do you feel about the way Anna Denise responds to the practical aspects of Thomas’s relationship with Les? To what extent does their relationship seem threatening to her? To what extent would such a relationship threaten you? Why or why not?

Davina

Is Davina a villain? Why or why not?

Is Davina a victim? Why or why not?

How does Davina grow and change over the course of the story? How do your feelings about her evolve?

How would you characterize Davina’s theology? What does she believe about God? What is the basis of her beliefs?

What do you think Davina’s motives are when she reveals to Thomas that he wasn’t the first to be unfaithful in his relationship?

Miguel

In one world, Miguel is a best-selling spiritual leader; in another he's a yoga teacher. What other "you" exists in a parallel world? How is that other's life different from your own, and what made it different? What can you learn from that other you?

How do you feel about the way Miguel reacts to events unfolding around him? What value might there be in this approach to life? How hard would it be for you to live that way?

Miguel is both deeply spiritual and deeply sexual. To what extent might these things be contradictory? To what extent might they be complimentary?

Ed and Warren

How do Ed and Warren compare with Thomas and Carter? What do they have in common? How are they different?

How do you feel about the ethics of what Ed does for Thomas? How ethical are Ed's actions? To what extent do you believe Ed's actions are justified? What would Ed say justifies those actions?

How would your life be different if you took Ed's advice and focused less on what makes you visible and more on what makes you lovable?

How does knowing Ed and Warren were inspired by a real couple (together fifty years) impact your feelings about these characters?

Hope

Is Hope a villain or a victim ... or something else?

Have you known someone in Hope's situation? How did that person's relationship with someone with an incompatible sexuality evolve?

Do you think Thomas made a mistake by looking up Hope once he was back in the Prime Universe? Do you feel Hope's reaction to Thomas was justified?

Carter

How does your perception of Carter change over the course of the story?

How responsible is Carter for the state of his relationship with Thomas?

Everyone in the beginning of the book loves or feels sympathy for Carter, seeing him as a victim of Thomas's indiscretions. How might knowing what Davina reveals — that Carter was the first to be unfaithful — change the way people feel about Carter? How did it change the way you feel about him?

Leo

Who would ultimately be better for Thomas: Leo or Carter?

How do you think Leo and Thomas's relationship will go, going forward? Do they have a chance? What will both of them have to guard against?

How do you feel about Thomas's decision not to sleep with Leo until they're married? Is it old-fashioned? Weird? What does such a decision say about Thomas's evolution?

Genre Questions

Let's say you own a bookstore. Do you shelve *Parallel Lines* in science fiction, romance, or comedy? Why?

In your opinion, should *Parallel Lines* be shelved along with regular fiction ... or in a special LGBTQ+ fiction section only? Why?

Romance

How do you feel about the outcome of the romance story? Is it believable to you? To what extent is it good or bad that Thomas and Carter don't get back together? To what degree is it satisfying that Thomas and Leo become a couple?

What do you think Thomas and Leo's future will be like?

Does *Parallel Lines* obey or defy the "rules" of romance novels? To what extent does it incorporate the things a successful romance novel should have?

What's the level of sexual heat in this novel? To what extent did you think that level was appropriate? What's the sexiest thing in the book?

Sci-Fi

How does the near-future setting of the book impact the story? What does it make possible? How did the setting impact the way you felt about the story, if at all?

Based on what you've read, what are the "rules" of alternate world-jumping in this book? How consistently are they employed? Which rule is your favorite? Which would be most frustrating to you?

If you had the opportunity to use a TRG to visit an alternative version of your own life for a day ... would you? What do you think you would see there? Do you think you would stay awake (and stay in that tangent) or go to sleep by midnight and come back home? What do you think you might learn during such a visit? What would be the best possible outcome? The worst?

How do you feel about the self-driving cars in this book? How realistic are their portrayal? Would you want one? How close are these to technologies that exist today?

Comedy

What's the funniest scene in the book? Was there a scene you found laugh-out-loud funny?

Who is the funniest character? Why?

How does this book walk the line between humor and political correctness? Does it ever cross the line? Are any of its jokes offensive? Which ones ... and why?

Topic and Theme Questions

LBGTQ+ Culture

How does this book depict LBGTQ+ people? What types of people are represented? Who's missing?

Tevin jokes that all tops drink IPA's and all bottoms drink gin. What assumptions are embedded in this joke? What benefits do we gain by using labels like top or bottom (or gay, straight, poly, asexual, queer, or questioning)? What limitations do these labels enforce? Which labels are you comfortable using ... and which labels do you avoid? Why?

Author Mark McElroy once joked that *Parallel Lines* is one of few novels that features an "actual bisexual" (with reference to Les). What would you expect of an "actual bisexual" character? To what extent do you see Les as an "actual bisexual?"

Parallel Lines features a long-term couple, Warren and Ed, one of whom is a mentor for Thomas. How many long-term LBGTQ+ couples do you know? How many LBGTQ+ "relationship mentors" have been a part of your life? What qualities make them good role models?

What would you say this book's attitude toward sexuality is? Is this book sex-positive?

Pornography and Addiction

How do you feel about this book's depiction of Thomas's relationship with pornography? What are your own feelings about pornography?

How would you differentiate between someone who watches porn versus someone addicted to it?

Thomas claims, at one point, to be an addict; would you agree? Why or why not?

Some readers have said they feel *Parallel Lines* is a metaphorical story about overcoming addiction. What aspects of the story would support this idea? What aspects of the story would contradict it?

In what ways would an addiction to pornography be similar to other addictions (drugs, alcohol, etc.)? How is it different?

What place does porn serve in a society? What positive or negative roles does it play in our lives? What's the difference between viewing porn and having a porn? Are there healthy uses of porn? (And, if so, what are they?)

Relationships

How often do you muse about romantic “roads not taken?” What would your life be like now if you'd have stayed in a relationship with your first crush, first significant other, or first lover?

How did your feelings about Thomas and Carter as a couple evolve as you read the book?

What would you say is the main obstacle keeping Thomas and Carter apart?

Who are some older couples you look to for inspiration and advice? Who would you own “Warren and Ed” be? What qualities make you admire or trust them?

At one point, a character observes, “Ed and Warren are thirty-year people. Some people aren't thirty-year people.” What makes a couple endure? In your experience, how rare are couples who reach their thirtieth anniversary? What would it take for you to be a thirty-year person?

What does Anna Denise's observation that a “Les loved by both of us must be better than a Les loved by one of us” suggest about a polygamous relationship? How do you feel about relationships that vary from the traditional? Why?

What does it take for someone to be polyamorous? What qualities are necessary to make polyamorous relationships successful?

By the end of the book, Les, Anna Denise, and Miguel have become a thurple. How do you feel about this arrangement? Under what circumstances can a thurple be successful?

Should society recognize or celebrate nontraditional relationships like thuples? Under what circumstances might such an arrangement work for you? What would you have to have in order to be successful as a thurple? Do you know any thuples ... or larger polyamorous or unconventional groups that have enjoyed long-term success?

How do you feel about the “morality” of Anna Denise's ultimate arrangement with Les and Miguel?

In the course of the story, we see several different versions of Ed's relationship with Davina. What aspects of their relationship stay the same from world to world? What aspects change? What lies at the root of those differences?

Is it good or bad that Thomas doesn't reunite with Carter? Why do you think so? How does one know when a relationship is salvageable? How does one know when a relationship is over?

Spirituality

What does this book have to say about religion and faith? How do you feel about that message? With which of the book's ideas about religion and faith do you agree or disagree?

How do you feel about Ed's comment, "Science and faith agree on one thing: there's more to the universe than we can ever explain."

What does *Parallel Lines* have to say about God or the nature of God? How do the characters (particularly Thomas) feel about God? How do their opinions about God change throughout the course of the book? How do you feel about God? How have these feelings evolved over time? What specific people or events sparked those changes?

What role does God play in this book?

Trooper Carey's husband, Adam, has a lot to say about how fundamentalist Christians have treated LGBTQ+ people. How authentic are his feelings? Do any of his experiences parallel yours or those of people you love?

Author Mark McElroy has called *Parallel Lines* a "surprisingly spiritual book," and admits the book's spiritual dimensions were unplanned and emerged as he wrote. How do you feel about the spirituality of this book? What does it have to say about spirit and spirituality?

Identity

What does this book have to say about personal identity? What makes us who we are? How possible is it to change who we are? What do we need to make that possible?

At one point, Thomas deletes all the hidden porn on his phone because having it there conflicts with his being the person he wants to be. Which of your own possessions define you, or make you more you? What things do you avoid in order to make a statement about who you are?

How diverse are the characters in this book? What kinds of diversity are represented? How does this impact the story?

Whenever he appears in different tangents, Thomas's body changes. Sometimes he's heavier or thinner, or has tattoos or piercings. Each time, his body reveals something about his past. What stories does your own body tell about you and your past?

Do you believe that certain people are "meant for each other?" Do you think we follow each other from life to life? Do you believe the same people are drawn together again and again? Whatever you believe about these things ... why do you believe it?

Who is someone you've known who has literally "changed who you are?"

Questions Best Asked over Drinks

Les is a bit obsessed with “the thing” and having Thomas do it for him or to him. While we never learn exactly what “the thing” is, presumably it’s a sexual act or indulgence of a fetish that presses all of Les’s buttons in all the best ways. Assuming “the thing” is a sexual act ... what’s your “the thing?”

What images are hidden on your phone, right now? Why hide them? Care to share one? Do you dare talk about why you keep it?

What would your like be like right now if you’d ended up with the very first person you ever had a crush on? The first person you dated? The first person you slept with?

What would it take for you to consider being in a thurple? What would be the advantages? The disadvantages? The challenges?

What’s your safe word?

The “Four L” Book Club Process

If your book club is well-established, you may already have a process you like to use from week to week. (Even just enjoying glasses of wine while asking, “What did you think?” is a process!)

But if you’re just getting started, or looking for something new, feel free to give this field-tested process a try.

Begin with a Check-in Question

You can introduce the check-in question by saying something like, “Today, let’s get started with a short check-in question to get us all in the book club mindset. We’ll go round-robin, giving each person a chance to answer the question. Remember: for check-in questions, answers should be brief — just a sentence or two. If ya start giving a long speech, we’ll lovingly cut you off after about 30 seconds and move to the next person!”

Good check-in questions are open-ended and anticipate short answers. Keep ‘em light! Here are some good stand-by check-in questions you can use again and again:

- What was your favorite scene (or chapter) in the book?
- What’s something you’d like to say to the author of this book, if you could?
- Who was your favorite character in this book?
- What three words would you use to describe this book?
- How likely are you to recommend this book to others?

You can, of course, use any check-in question you come up with!

What did you love?

Toss out the question: “What’s something you loved about this book?”

The answers can focus on characters, the story, the writing ... anything at all! The goal, though, is to keep commentary positive ... for now. If someone strays into negatives or harsh critiques, gently remind them there will be a time to share things they didn’t like later.

When people have spoken up, or when you feel the energy drooping, continue on to the next phase of the discussion.

What does the book lack?

Toss out the question: “Okay, now: what does this book lack? What’s missing? What were you looking for that you didn’t find? What didn’t you like?”

Again, answers can be wide-ranging. As moderator, do try to keep people on topic, gently prompting those who stray from the question at hand.

When people are ready (or when it’s time) to move on, continue to the next phase of the discussion.

What did you learn?

Ask, “What can this book teach us? What did you learn about the subject matter? The characters and their challenges? The themes or topics of the book? What caught your attention, felt new, or challenged one of your beliefs?”

When people are ready, or when it’s time to move on, continue to the next phase of the discussion.

What did you long for?

Did you yearn for the story to go in some direction ... only to find that it didn’t? Was the ending what you’d hoped ... or not? Were there characters you wanted to know more about or see more often? If there’s a sequel, what should it focus on?

Continuing the Conversation

The Four L process (Loved, Lacked, Learned, and Longed for) usually generates lively discussion and thorough coverage of the book. But you can always follow this up with free-form discussion.

As the session moderator, you can also work in any of the questions from the first few pages of this guide. Please don’t ask them all! Pick between three and five that feel right, and go with those.

Have a great session!

Legal, Copyright, and Newsletter Info

Yeah, it sucks: but I have to include a legal and copyright page.

But listen: as a book club leader, you're authorized to use this guide, print it, copy it, or whatever you need to do in order to facilitate your group discussion. Want to email a copy to all participants? Please, go ahead!

The only thing I ask you not to do is charge anyone for this file or copies of it. I can't exactly stop you, but if you do, Anna Denise is going to come looking for you, and you don't really want that, do you?

That said: here's the copyright info:

The *Parallel Lines Discussion Guide* is copyrighted (c) 2024 by Mark McElroy. Free use among book clubs to facilitate discussion of the novel *Parallel Lines* is absolutely granted.

For more information on Parallel Lines, including sample chapters and behind the scenes info, please visit: <https://markmcelroy.com/parallellines>

Want to buy copies of Parallel Lines? [Please use this link](#), or visit [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and search on "Parallel Lines McElroy."

Do you have questions for me? [You can write me, the author, directly](#). I can't answer every message, but I promise I read every single one! I'm mark@markmcelroy.com.

And finally, to get the latest news, sample chapters from upcoming work, or be selected as a potential beta reader for future novels, [please sign up for my once-a-month newsletter](#) at <https://markmcelroy.com/subscribe-get-posts-by-email>.

I appreciate you!