

# **The Night the Lights Went Out**

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## *Questions for Discussion*

1. A matriarch in a small town is a familiar character for many readers. How is the character of Sugar used to progress the story and provide the backbone for it?
2. Female friendships, such as the unlikely bond between Sugar and Merilee and the friendship between Heather and Merilee, are the core of the story. Why do you think these friendships were struck up suddenly? What is it about human nature that causes people to gravitate toward finding friendship?
3. Acceptance is a major topic in the story, with both Merilee and Heather having felt rejected as children and, as an adult, Merilee wanting to be accepted by the other mothers. What causes the need for acceptance? Is it society or our human nature?
4. Family life is seen in many different ways in the novel, including what it means to be a mother—through the eyes of Sugar, Merilee, and Heather—and what it means to have a mother. In what ways do each woman’s experiences with her mother define her own ideas of motherhood and parenting?
5. The identity of the gossip blogger is revealed at the end—were you surprised at who it was? Did you have other guesses? How did the blogger fit into the story of a small town and help to feed the rumor mill?
6. Sugar’s life during the Depression in Sweet Apple provides a stark contrast to the way present-day inhabitants of Sweet Apple live, especially Heather. Do you know anyone who grew up during the Great Depression, and if so, does this person have an attitude toward money that is similar to Sugar’s?
7. The “mean girl” phenomenon is present in the novel for both the adults and the children. Is peer pressure something that you struggle with as well? Do you know any bullies or anyone who has been bullied?
8. Why do you think Sugar never went to the police for help in the past? Do you think she did the right thing in not doing so?