

Discussion Questions (Dirty Little Angels)

- 1) In the novel, Hailey consistently expresses her emotions by comparing her feelings to the feelings of characters from popular movies or television shows. What does this reveal about Hailey's mental/emotional state? What does this reveal about the impact of pop culture on young people today?
- 2) In traditional southern gothic novels, authors often presented characters with physical deformities to indicate some kind of spiritual deformity. Moses and Hailey's uncle both possess physical deformities. What do these deformities convey about their character?
- 3) Many of the characters in the novel seem to strive for physical perfection. Point to characters who demonstrate these desires. What does their desire for perfection suggest about their view of the world. On a larger scale, what does this convey about America's definition of beauty.
- 4) *Dirty Little Angels* is replete with architectural wreckage, rust, and a general atmosphere of rot and decay. In what ways does this landscape reflect the inner consciousness or morality of the characters?
- 5) The Southern gothic was incubated during the upheaval of an industrialization period that transformed the Old South. As a result, many of the novels of the time used striking visual images (ie. missing limbs resulting from industrial accidents) to convey the negative impact of technology on society. In what way does *Dirty Little Angels* capture the New South's technological ruin? Specifically, how does the novel present plastic surgery as a dangerous type of "postindustrial" cosmetic technology (HINT: Hailey's uncle's botched hair transplant and Meridian's leaking breast implants).
- 6) How, specifically, does Hailey's view of religion change after she meets Moses?
- 7) In many ways Moses Watkins is a master of manipulation. In what specific ways does Moses manipulate Cyrus and Hailey?
- 8) Hailey describes Meridian as someone who grows on you "like a tumor." This statement seems to suggest that Meridian's personality is cancerous. Do you agree with Hailey's depiction of Meridian? In what ways is Hailey's statement a metaphor for her relationship with Meridian's?
- 9) Many of the characters in the novel have a distorted view of religion. Discuss each character's view of religion (particularly Hailey, her mother, Cyrus, and Moses) and explain how each of their perspectives is distorted.

10) Though the novel's ending is tragic, the final line seems strangely optimistic. How does Hailey's final thought concerning the dirty little angels reveal her desire for redemption?