

Discussion Questions for
The Refuge
by Ann H. Gabhart

- The Shakers were a unique group of people. What do you find to admire about their communities? What do you not admire?
- In the first line of the book, Darcie says “You can’t cheat death.” Do you agree?
- We know now that the Shakers didn’t have cholera deaths because they had clean drinking water, but at the time of the worst epidemics, the cause of cholera was unknown. People just knew the Shaker villages seemed immune to the disease. Were Darcie and Walter right to join the Shakers to escape cholera even though they had no intentions of becoming Shakers?
- Flynn was talented at training horses but not as good at handling his young daughter. Do you think people have a tendency to spoil a child who has suffered a sad loss in his or her life?
- When Silas gets married, he does so thinking that will help Flynn and Leatrice. What should he have done differently? Do you think sometimes families don’t communicate well and that leads to problems?
- After Walter’s death, Darcie feels she can’t leave the Shaker village because she has nowhere else to go. Do you agree she had no other choices or could she have done something differently? Opportunities for a single woman were lacking in the 1800s. Can you imagine living in a time where that was true?
- Did Flynn do the right thing by taking Leatrice to live with the Shakers? Why do you think it was so hard for him to wait a week to go back to see her?
- Leatrice wanted to go to the Shaker school to learn to read but she didn’t want to leave her father. Have you ever been in a position where you wanted something badly but at the same time you didn’t want to do whatever was necessary in order to do or get what you wanted?
- Even though Darcie had no interest in becoming a committed Shaker, she did form very close ties with her Shaker sisters. Have you ever had friends who were like sisters to you?
- The Shakers took in orphans and other children in need to boost their membership numbers, but nine out of ten of those children left the communities when they reached the age to be able to do so. Was giving these children a place to live a good thing for the Shakers to do? Do you believe desperate mothers might have really left babies on the Shaker doorsteps?
- Sister Mona came whirling into my story out of nowhere while I was writing *The Refuge*, but she needed to be part of the story. Did you like her? Why do you think she was so

determined to not be nice? Do you think it is true what Darcie says that praying for someone makes you love them? Have you ever prayed for someone you didn't like because they were hard to get along with?

- Darcie eventually felt forced to take a leap of faith and leave the Shaker village with her baby. Do you think that took courage? What else could she have done?