

Discussion Questions for
The Outsider
by Ann H. Gabhart

- One of the Shaker sayings is “Hands to work and hearts to God.” The Shakers believed all who lived among them should work if able and do their share of the labor. Do you think this is the reason the Shakers had so many good years living the Shaker life?
- One of the Shakers’ aims was to shut away the world in order to establish a community where they could live a perfect life here on earth. Do you think they were successful or ever could be successful in this hope this side of heaven?
- The Shakers celebrated gifts of all types. One of the most desired gifts among their community of believers was the gift to be simple. What do you think they meant by that?
- Gabrielle’s gift of knowing was admired by the Shakers who at one time in their history had a season of many manifestations. This story is set decades before the Era of Manifestations or Mother’s Work as the Shakers called it, but visions were always a part of the Shaker history. Do you believe gifts such as Gabrielle had to “see” things that she could not physically see or to know the future come from the Lord? Can such diverse gifts be used for the Lord?
- Do you think Gabrielle would have been happier if she had not had this gift of knowing?
- Gabrielle loved being a Shaker, but once she was drawn to the doctor, she felt divided. Do you think the ends the Shakers went to in order to keep her in their fold instead pushed her away? Do you think it took courage for her to walk away from the Shaker village? Did she do the right thing?
- How do you think the death of Becca and Sister Esther’s suicide changed how Gabrielle felt about being a Shaker? Why do you think she wanted them to be buried close together? How much have attitudes about suicide changed from when it was considered a sin that left one with no chance for forgiveness?
- The Battle at the River Raisin was a tragic defeat for the nation during the War of 1812. Historians sometimes call it the River Raisin Massacre. Did you know this history before you read the story? Did the story make you want to find out more?
- The Shakers were a unique group of people. What do you find to admire about their communities? What do you not admire?