

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR

# BEST KEPT SECRET

Book #3 in The Clifton Chronicles by Jeffrey Archer

1. During his press tour in the United States, Harry notices how differently the world of the press works there, and how much more interest they place on scandal in American news outlets than in English ones. Do you think this discrepancy says anything about the differences between the two countries?
2. In order to adopt Jessica Smith (nee Piotrovska), Emma and Harry have to deal with a lot of bureaucracy and politics, both to qualify for adoption, and to get Jessica instead of another girl. What do you think of this adoption system? Does it seem fair to the parents who wish to adopt? Does it seem fair to the children who need to be adopted?
3. Once they have adopted Jessica, Harry and Emma decide to put off telling her the truth about her birth parents, and her blood relationship to her adopted family, despite Giles', and later Sebastian's, urgings to the contrary. What do you think of their decision? Is there ever a right time to reveal something like that?
4. Though World War II is over and the Nazis have been defeated, it's clear that anti-Semitism is still a large part of Western society, both from the way Jessica's adoption is handled by those in charge of the institution, and from the treatment of and statements by Victor Kaufman. What does it say about Western society, that it painted Hitler as the ultimate evil, yet still embraced one of his ideology's core beliefs?
5. Elizabeth Barrington secretly changes her will so that Giles doesn't inherit her money, because she doesn't like Giles' fiancée Virginia. What do you think of her decision? Was it her way of showing loving concern for Giles, or was she meddling where she shouldn't have by trying to dictate to her son who he should marry?
6. What do you think about England's divorce laws, as demonstrated by Giles' trip to a hotel with a faux-prostitute in order to give Lady Virginia grounds for divorce? Do they seem unfair? Do you think there is any gender bias in the laws?
7. One of the main antagonists in this book is Major Alex Fisher. He cites Giles taking what should have been his Military Cross, and thus stalling his military career, as reasons for wanting to ruin the Barrington family. Do you think that's really his motivation? If so, does it justify what he does? If not, what is his motivation?

8. In order to destabilize Barrington Shipping, Major Fisher and Lady Virginia engage in insider trading, and despite the plan that puts an end to their scheme, they essentially get away with it. Do you feel that this speaks more about the state of the free market, or about human nature? Is there some flaw in capitalist system that allows for such transactions, or are some people simply incapable of resisting the temptation?
9. The Clifton Chronicles is filled with smart, determined women. In this book, Emma is offered a place on the board of Barrington Shipping, because those around her see her intelligence. Still, the characters admit that this was unusual for the time. Do you think Emma's appointment speaks about her unusually high level of intelligence and qualification, or is it a more general step towards gender equality?
10. Sebastian as a young man is very intelligent, but not highly motivated. How does he compare to a young Harry Clifton? Do you see father-son similarities? If so, what are they? If not, why do you think they aren't there?
11. Although the British government knows how dangerous it could be for Sebastian to unknowingly act as Don Pedro Martinez's smuggler, they convince Harry and Emma to let him continue, for the sake of crippling Don Pedro's operations. Do you agree with this? Does it seem reasonable or callous to put the safety of one boy in danger for the sake of a nation's financial stability?
12. We see Don Pedro's emotional reaction when he realizes that his son Bruno is in the car with Sebastian, but we see no attempt to put a stop to his plan, and the car is still run off the road. Do you think this is because Don Pedro couldn't get in touch with the truck drivers fast enough, or did he let the operation continue despite knowing it would lead to his son's death? What does your belief about this situation say about Don Pedro's character as a whole?