



delirium by LAUREN OLIVER
DISCUSSION GUIDE

delirium

Bestselling Author of BEFORE I FALL

LAUREN OLIVER

ABOUT THE BOOK

Lena Haloway has always looked forward to the day when she'll be cured. Before the cure, the disease of love—the *deliria*—ran rampant; once it infected you, there was no escaping its hold. But things are different now. Scientists are able to eradicate love, and the government demands that all citizens receive the cure upon turning eighteen. Lena can't wait for her eighteenth birthday, for a life without love and without pain: safe, measured, predictable, and happy.

But with ninety-five days left until her treatment, Lena does the unthinkable: She falls in love. Her relationship with Alex, a boy from the Wilds who is living under the government's radar, threatens both of their lives. It also leads Lena to the truth about her family, her government, her feelings, and the incredible power of being able to say "I love you."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List the symptoms of *amor deliria nervosa*. How dangerous are they? What would lead someone to classify love as a disease? Do you agree that, in some ways, love could be thought of as a disease? Why or why not?
2. Lena says that some years ago, the government broadcast film of a girl jumping off a roof to avoid being cured. What kind of government would broadcast such a warning to its citizens? What does Lena's government want for its people? What would motivate people to be evaluators, guards, or regulators in such a government?
3. *The Book of Shhh* says "marriage is Order and Stability, the mark of a Healthy society" (p. 11). What role do you think marriage plays in Lena's society? What role do you think marriage plays in today's society? Is love an important part of marriage? Should people be able to marry whomever they want? Why, or why not?
4. Before the evaluations, an unhappy Hana says that if her government really wanted people to be happy, "they'd let us pick" (p. 20). What do you think of the idea of having a pre-determined, worry-free life planned out for you? Do you need to make your own choices in order to be happy? Why, or why not?
5. Lena longs for "the promise of the cure," which she describes as "the chance to be reborn: newer, fresher, better. Healed and whole and perfect again" (p. 112). If given the chance, would you want to be cured? What are some reasons why a person might wish to undergo the treatment?
6. Describe Hana and Lena's relationship and the role that jealousy plays in their friendship. Are you ever jealous of your friends? What effect does that have on your behavior or your feelings for them?
7. Near the beginning of the story, Lena says that the words *I love you* are "strange and terrible" (p. 40). Why? How do Lena's feelings about those words change during the course of the story?

8. Describe Lena's memories of her mother. The things they did together are viewed as dangerous in Lena's society. Do you have childhood memories that are similar to Lena's? What do you think your life would be like if those memories were inextricably linked to feelings of wrongdoing and guilt? How do things change for Lena when she discovers the truth about her mother?
9. At the barn party, Lena describes music and a singing voice "as thick and heavy as warm honey, spilling up and down a scale" (p. 123). What kind of music do you think she is hearing? Why would the government ban music or other works of art? Alex tells Lena that the music and the parties are all right because "nobody's hurting anybody" (p. 133). Do you agree?
10. In Lena's society, uncured girls are segregated from uncured boys. Imagine if you were a teenage girl and never allowed to spend time around boys who were uncured. What effect would that have on you? How would it change your life? Would you try to rebel against society's rules, knowing the consequences?
11. The government's raids are incredibly invasive, and Lena says that "private property laws are suspended on raid nights. Pretty much every law is suspended on raid nights" (p. 202). Why do the citizens allow such raids to take place? Would you know if your government was headed in this direction? Would you be able to turn things around? How would you go about it?
12. As Lena walks away from Riley, her neighbors' dog, as he dies, all she can think is, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry" (p. 209). Why is she sorry? If you follow the rules in a society like Lena's, are you complicit in all the bad things that happen?
13. Alex refers to the government's tactics as "smoke and mirrors" (p. 270). What does he mean? Do you agree? What does it take to keep people obedient?
14. Lena says she's glad she has "lost control" (p. 311), and she begins to think that while love can be painful, "the pain only makes it better, more intense, more worth it" (p. 265). Do you recognize these feelings? Do you agree that it's necessary to lose control or feel pain in order to be happy?
15. What role does *The Book of Shhh* play in Lena's society? How have works such as the Bible or *Romeo and Juliet* been changed in order to fit the needs of Lena's government?
16. What clues indicate the time period in which the story is set? Do you interpret *Delirium* as taking place in the future, or in an alternate version of the present?
17. Research the term *dystopian fiction*. What is a dystopia? Read the first chapter of another dystopian novel or a short story (some ideas: Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, or Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*). What similarities and differences do you see compared to *Delirium*?

Love:

a single word, a wispy thing, a word no bigger or longer than an edge. That's what it is: an edge; a razor. It draws up through the center of your life, cutting everything in two. Before and after. The rest of the world falls away on either side.

Before and after—and during, a moment no bigger or longer than an edge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Oliver, a graduate of the University of Chicago and NYU's MFA program, lives in Brooklyn, New York. Her first novel, *Before I Fall*, was a *New York Times* bestseller. She is also the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Delirium* and *Pandemonium*, the first two books in a trilogy that concludes with *Requiem*. You can visit her online and read her blog at www.laurenoliverbooks.com.



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