READING GROUP QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The setting for *Dogwood* is West Virginia. In what ways is the setting a character?

2. One legend says Christ was crucified on a dogwood tree, which at one time grew straight and tall; then he promised it would never be used for executions again. "Slender and twisted it shall always be, with cross-shaped blossoms for all to see." What significance does this legend have in the themes and characters of the novel?

3. Will Hatfield is a Christ figure. In what ways does his life parallel the life of Jesus? To what lengths does he go to pursue his love? Conversely, what are Will's flaws?

4. Karin is a character who, in a sense, cannot respond to Will's love. How does her life parallel the spiritual condition of every person?

5. Ruthie Bowles is a figure floating between Will and Karin, piecing together their history as she probes their past. In what ways is Ruthie the catalyst to the changes these two experience? Have you known a "Ruthie" in your own life?

6. Describe Will's relationship with his brother, Carson. How does Carson reflect the feelings of the community?

7. Will has a special relationship with his father. In what ways does Will's life mirror his father's? How does his father's love help mold and shape Will?

8. At the end of the novel, we see a change in Karin's life. What circumstances aid in her turnaround? What kind of future do you think she has? Has seeing the truth ever helped you change in some way?

9. Danny Boyd is a plaintive voice throughout the book, giving a behind-the-scenes look at the pain his family has experienced. How did you respond to his counseling experience?

10. How does Karin's brother, Bobby Ray, escape his fate at the end of the novel?

11. One theme of the novel is sacrifice. What would you say to a person who sacrificed for you and pursued you as Will did Karin?