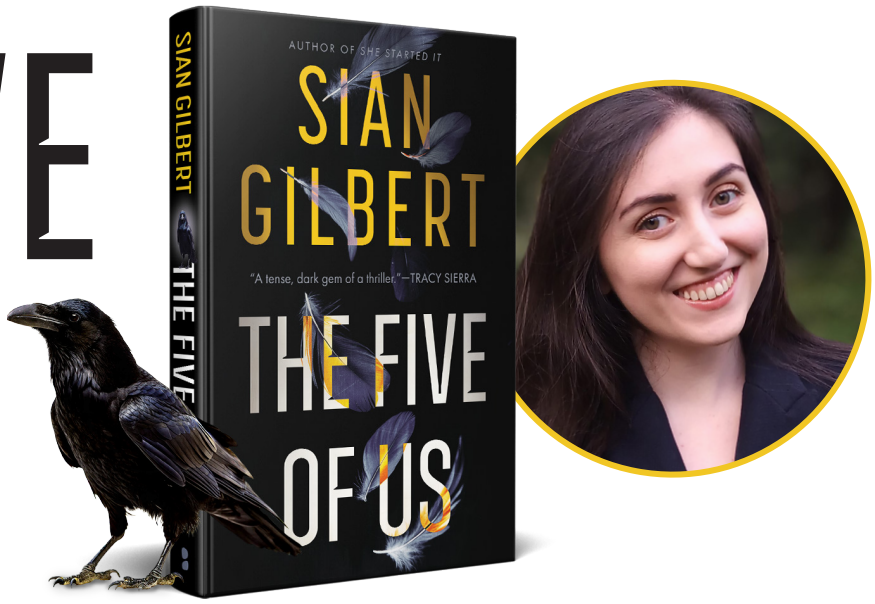
THE FIVE OF US



SIAN GILBERT

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. We never learn Crow, Cuckoo, Goldfinch, Starling, or Wren's real names. What do you think the significance of this is, and why do you think the author chose to give them bird nicknames in particular? What do you make of the fact that Goldie's name is contracted further?

2. The five girls' descent into delinquency ends in fatal consequences. Did you find their gradual progression from well-behaved schoolgirls to dangerous rebels convincing? What do you make of their evolving personalities as they break more and more rules?

3. Bishop's House is a central setting in the novel. Why do you think it becomes so important to the girls, and what do you think it represents?

4. When Cuckoo stabs Hugo Fletcher, were you surprised? What about afterward, when the five girls kill and conceal him together? Is Crow delivering the final blow a result of peer pressure, or something she wanted to do? What does this escalation in their behavior demonstrate about them? Do they understand the gravity of their actions?

5. "She is a freeze-frame that never ends." How did you react to Goldie's death toward the end of Part One? What do you think it represents thematically for the narrative? Do you think Goldie would have approved of her friends letting everyone think she was a missing person?

6. This is a novel of two halves. Which did you prefer, and why? Which themes do you think are most prevalent in each half? How important do you think class commentary is to both sections?

7. Cassandra Fletcher is a complicated character. We learn that what she values most is "simply being," even if that means covering up for her husband's murders. How do you feel about her and the choices she makes throughout the novel, and what do you think of her own assessment of her life at the moment of her death that she would do it all again?

8. "I was in denial. Swamped in grief. I was not prepared for a child, especially not one as precocious as her. Maybe I did resent her, alright? Maybe there was some hate there. But I love her too. I never said it, but I love her. She's my brother's child." Does this passage and what we learn about Patricia in this chapter change your perception of her from the first half of the novel? Do you have any sympathy for her?

9. Do you think the ending for Patricia is deserved? Do you think it is fair that Crow, Cuckoo, Wren, and Starling face no legal repercussions for their part in what happened?

10. Goldie has the final word in the story. Even though she is physically absent from the second half of the novel, her impact is still felt by each of her friends in different ways. What did you make of the ways they still remembered and connected with Goldie? Was her presence emotionally resonant for you? Would you agree that Goldie is the most important character in the novel?

11. Did you find the ending was what you wanted, or would you have preferred something different? Do you consider it a happy ending or a sad one, and why?

12. This book explores the impact of lockdown on a young generation and the experiences they lost forever during the pandemic. Do you think the novel effectively highlights their anger and frustration? Through the lens of a thriller, is this wider theme explored enough? What do you think about how the pandemic and lockdown have changed younger generations?

13. Which character was your favorite, and why? Do you also have a favorite scene?

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