

The Personal Librarian: Discussion Questions

By Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray

- How familiar were you with “passing” before reading the book? Consider and discuss the toll extracted when your public face has to be constantly vigilant and constantly striving to be within the bounds of society’s “normal or average”.
- In some ways, Belle’s parents had somewhat unique experiences or backgrounds. How did that affect Belle’s relationships with her mother, her father and her siblings?
- What sort of pressure do you think Belle might have experienced from the rumors about her true ethnicity? Do you think J.P. Morgan heard the rumors? Do you think he knew she was passing as white and decided to ignore it, or do you think he was unaware of her heritage?
- What do you think happened romantically between Belle and J. P Morgan? What about the relationship between Belle and Bernard Berenson?
- What sacrifices did Belle make by choosing to follow her mother’s path? What advantages did she gain?
- What surprised you most about Belle’s life? About the time period?
- Describe one significant episode for you in reading the book.
- How do the racial issues and events in the book relate to events happening today?
- What was something you liked about the book? What was something you disliked about the book?
- If you could ask the authors anything, what would you ask?
- Working for the Pierpont Morgan library was Belle’s absolute dream job. Imagine you she felt walking into the library that first day. Do you like libraries? What’s your literary dream job?

Discussion questions reworked from Reading Group discussion questions and Libromaniacs.com