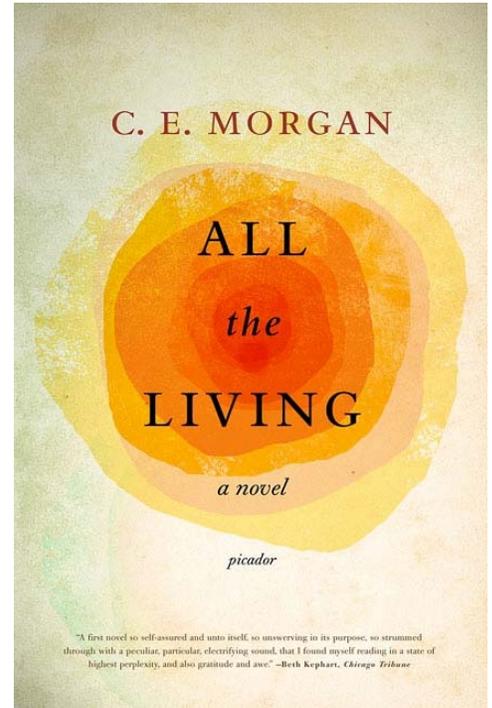


# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *All the Living* A Novel

by C. E. Morgan

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *All the Living* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *All the Living*.

### About the Book

Aloma is an orphan, raised by her aunt and uncle, educated at a mission school in the Kentucky mountains. At the start of the novel, she moves to an isolated tobacco farm to be with her lover, a young man named Orren, whose family has died in a car accident, leaving him in charge. The place is rough and quiet; Orren is overworked and withdrawn. Left mostly to her own, Aloma struggles to settle herself in this lonely setting and to find beauty and stimulation where she can. As she decides whether to stay with Orren, she will choose either to fight her way to independence or accept the rigors of commitment.

Both a drama of age-old conflicts and a portrait of modern life, C. E. Morgan's debut novel is “simply astonishing . . . a book about life force, the precious will to live, and all the things that can suck it right out of a person” (Susan Salter Reynolds, *Los Angeles Times*).

## About the Author

**C. E. Morgan** studied English and voice at Berea College and holds a master's in theological studies from Harvard Divinity School. She lives in Kentucky.

## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the novel's title and epigraph. What truths about hope and mortality are captured in this passage from Ecclesiastes? How does this passage relate to love?
2. How are Orren and Aloma defined by tragedy? How is Aloma affected by the many voids in her past? How is Orren affected by constant immersion in traces of his past?
3. What does sex mean to Orren and Aloma? Is their mutual attraction sparked by a physical hunger, or an emotional hunger? How does this shift throughout the novel?
4. What does Orren think of the two houses on his property? What aspects of himself are represented by each one?
5. How do power and money shape Aloma's role in this relationship, and in many relationships, regardless of wealth or poverty? Does Orren want Aloma to be financially dependent on him?
6. Though *All the Living* unfolds in the 1980s, many members of this community hold fast to old-fashioned attitudes. What are the costs and benefits of living in a locale that is removed, in some ways, from the modern world?
7. How did your understanding of the characters' circumstances change as you read *All the Living*, based on what was revealed and withheld in the opening scenes? Were your first impressions of Aloma and Orren accurate?
8. Discuss the role of religion in the characters' lives. Is Bell an unconventional preacher? Do he and Aloma share any common ground in their perception of God?
9. Why does music have such a powerful effect on Aloma? How is she transformed, even healed, by playing the piano? Do any of the novel's other characters fully understand what music means to her?
10. How is Orren affected by the reminders of his family that remain on the farm? Is it healthy for him to feel so determined to make the farm successful?

11. How do Orren's memories of his mother influence his expectations of Aloma? How does Bell's mother influence his sense of self?

12. What is special about the novel's backdrop of pure nature? What aspects of this landscape, and the livestock's cycles of birth and death, become characters in themselves?

13. In what ways do Orren and Aloma share similar temperaments? In what ways are they fundamentally different?

14. Would you have left Orren for Bell?

15. In the closing scenes, Orren commands Aloma to remain faithful to him. What insecurities lie beneath his jealousy? What role do jealousy and insecurity play in most relationships?

16. As Orren led Aloma up to the old house on the novel's last page, what did you predict for their future?

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