

Paging the Dead

by Brynn Bonner
Reader's Guide

1. Sophreena and Esme are very different types of people, not only in their physical appearances but also in their personalities, demeanor, their approach to work—and life. Yet, despite a rocky beginning (at least on Sophreena's part) they have developed a very close, meaningful relationship. Do you believe the old folk adage that opposites attract? Are there any examples of that in your own life?
2. Many people who take up researching their family histories say they do it because they *want to know where they come from*. Often times they don't mean a physical location only, but an exploration of how they came to be the people they are. What is there in their genetic make-up, their personalities, their quirks, their innate talents, their compunctions and their dreams that drifted down from generations before. Judging from what you know of your own ancestry, what do you think are the strongest traits that have passed down in your family?
3. On the back cover of the book Esme is described as a gifted medium. Do you think that's true? Esme herself says we all have intuition but that most of us don't work to develop it or tune into it. What do you think? Have you ever had an experience that you regard as extra-sensory?
4. Dorothy Pritchett seems to be an unhappy woman and she doesn't treat others well (with very few exceptions). Despite this there are people who seem to care for her and truly grieve her passing. What do you think are her redeeming characteristics for those people? What are some of the things from her past that shaped her attitudes?

5. Sophreena and Esme's Genealogy Club has grown from a shared-interest group to a circle of very close friends despite their varied ages, genders, backgrounds and circumstances. Have you ever belonged to a group like this? In what ways did it affect your life?
6. Morningside, NC is a typical small town. On the plus side, everyone knows everyone, or at least OF everyone and that can be a comfort. On the minus side, as Esme would say, every-old-body seems to mind everybody else's business. Support and familiarity vs. privacy, is it worth the tradeoff?
7. Sophreena and Esme often face the thorny problem of discovering skeletons in family closets. They have a policy of reporting everything they find to the client. Some of those clients want to bury the information while others have a "warts and all" philosophy about family history. Which do you think is the best way to deal with the black sheep and the ugly secrets?
8. How do you think you would react if you found out you have a secret half-sibling? Do you think Dorothy's actions were reasonable given her upbringing and the general family dysfunction?
9. What do you make of Esme's reluctance to get involved (socially) with Detective Carlson after she and Sophreena are cleared? Is she just being stubborn about maintaining her independence or does she have the self-knowing wisdom to realize she is not suited for a relationship?
10. Sophreena's work is all about family, yet she has none. Do you think this is why she forms close bonds with those around her? Is it possible to "build-you-own" family without blood ties?