**The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides**

The narrator and his friends piece together the events that led up to suicides of the Lisbon girls, brainy Therese, fastidious Mary, ascetic Bonnie, libertine Lux, and saintly Cecilia.

**Why you'll like it:** Coming of age. Compelling. Experimental. Set in Detroit.

**About the Author:** Jeffrey Eugenides was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1960. Educated at Brown and Stanford Universities, Eugenides received an MA in English and Creative Writing from Stanford in 1986.

**Questions for discussion**

1. The Virgin Suicides is narrated through the collective voice of a group of boys who fell under the spell of the Lisbon sisters twenty years ago. Why do you think Eugenides chose this unusual method of narration? What effect does it achieve?

2. How would you describe the tone of the narrative? How would you describe the author’s use of humor? Were there particular passages that you found amusing and if so what were they? Why do you think he chose to treat such a serious subject in a humorous fashion?

3. ‘They weren’t all that different from my sister’ Kevin Head says after Homecoming. What is it about the Lisbon sisters that sets them apart from other young girls in the community and so intrigues the boys?

4. How have the lives of the boys been affected by the sisters and what happened that summer?

5. We learn a great deal about Cecilia and about Lux but very little about Bonnie, Therese or Mary. Why does the narrator concentrate on these two sisters?

6. Several characters come up with an explanation for the suicides including Ms Perl, Dr Hornicker, Mr Hedlie and the narrator. Which one do you find most credible and why?

7. We know from the first paragraph that all five of the Lisbon sisters will take her own life. How did this affect your reading of the book? Why do you think he chose this structure and what effect does it achieve?

8. As the novel progresses it becomes clear that the boys have conducted an investigation of the...
circumstances surrounding the girls’ suicides. How well do you think this works as a narrative device?

9. At first the novel's title appears straightforward but given Lux’s promiscuity, what do you think the author means by it?

10. What does the book say about adolescence and in particular, what does it say about the attitudes of adolescent boys to young women? How would you describe the feelings of the collective narrator towards the sisters? How accurate a portrayal of adolescence do you think this is? How do other characters see the sisters and how does Eugenides convey these views? How different are those views from those of the boys?

11. How would you describe the Lisbon family and the relationships between its various members?

12. What effect does Cecilia's suicide have on the community? How do people try to cope with it and how do their reactions change? How do their parents, their neighbors and their classmates treat the surviving sisters?

13. What were some of the underlying causes that may have led to the suicides of the Lisbons in The Virgin Suicides?

14. What is the significance of Lux inviting the boys over and them killing themselves while the boys waited?