***A Very Fine House* Study Guide**

The following suggested questions are to guide discussion and/or gain an understanding of the social and political climate of the early 1970s. Historical/political (HP), and social/environmental (SE) references are organized by chapter titles.

**The World is Coming to an End**

(SE) Page 21:  Letty says that black was beautiful. She is alluding to a social movement of the early 70s. What was this movement?

(HP) Page 21:  Claire’s family fled Cuba in the early 1960s. Research why many Cubans fled during that period.

(SE) Page 23:  Research pagan babies. Are there any modern equivalents that address the plight of poor children in third world countries?

(SE) Page 24:  Letty’s teachers claimed that Catholic school children were getting a better education than those in the public schools. Why were the newspapers claiming that “Johnny Can’t Read?”

(SE) Page 26:  The girls discuss people who sit in trees until their demands are met. Research the Elm Conflict in 1971. Was the protest successful?

(HP) Page 34: Tim Hennessey explains that his brother’s student deferment was canceled. What does this mean?

(HP) Page 35:  Why were East Pakistan and West Pakistan at war? What happened to these two countries?

(HP) Page 35:  What is firebombing? Why was this happening in Northern Ireland?

(SE) Page 35:  Why were white students being bused to schools with predominately black student populations in Boston? How was this issue resolved?

(HP) Page 35:  Why were prisoners rioting at Attica Prison?

(HP) Page 35:  Who is Charles Manson, and why was he on death row? Research whether he was executed. Explain the circumstances.

**Afton Fellows**

(HP) Page 38:  Was Dr. Tichenor a real person? Briefly describe his contribution to history.

(HP) Page 38:  Afton’s father, Gerard Case, was wounded at the Battle of Bentonville during the Civil War. How was this battle significant to the end of the war?

(HP) Page 41:  In his letter to Afton, Cedric Fellows says that his work on the Panama Canal would be for the “betterment of the world.” How is the world better because of the Panama Canal?

**Grounded**

(HP) Page 51:  Letty learns that the President Nixon ordered the bombing of Laos and Cambodia despite what he claimed. This act resulted in a bill passed by Congress called the War Powers Resolution. Research the War Powers Resolution and briefly explain it.

(HP) Page 51:  Lynn’s father tells her that “secret papers” have exposed that the war is bigger than what the government was reporting. What are these secret papers and what did they reveal?

(HP) Page 52:  Blythe wanted to know if the students in her class should go out and join the war protesters who were getting arrested. What were the war protests and why were the protesters getting arrested?

(HP) Page 58:  During history class, a student says that American Indians had taken over Alcatraz? Research the American Indian Movement (AIM). Why did they occupy Alcatraz?

**Robin Drive**

(SE) Page 61:  Mr. Kirkland committed suicide because he suffered from battle fatigue or post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Is this still a problem with soldiers who served in the wars in the Middle East?

(SE) Page 64:  Who are the Hare Krishnas?

(HP) Page 71:  Mr. Chappel mentions the 26th Amendment. What is the subject of this amendment, and why was it passed during this period?

(HP) Page 72:  The Equal Rights Amendment was very controversial. Research this amendment and explain the argument of both the pros and the cons. Who were some of the most vocal proponents and critics of this proposed amendment?

**Wanda**

(HP) Page 92:  Two of Afton’s sons died fighting World War I. What were the major alliances called, and what were the major countries involved?

(HP) Page 103:  Afton’s son, Wade, died in the battle at Meuse-Argonne, France. What is significant about this battle?

**A Questioning of Faith**

(SE) Page 129:  Lynn says that many American soldiers in Vietnam were using drugs. How prevalent was the drug problem among American soldiers during the Vietnam war?

(SE) Page 131:  Letty says that it dawned on her what the Rolling Stones meant by their song, “Mother’s Little Helper.” What is mother’s little helper?

(SE) Page 134:  What is a P.O.W. bracelet?

(SE) Page 136:  Letty mentions a book titled, *The Population Bomb*. Research the book and explain why Letty was so alarmed by it. Does the premise of the book hold true today?

(SE) Page 137:  Letty mentions a book titled, *Silent Spring*. Research the book and explain why Letty was so alarmed by it. Does the premise of the book hold true today?

(SE) How are *The Population Bomb* and *Silent Spring* similar?

(HP) Page 138:  Why did the newspapers report a burglary in the Watergate building in Washington, D.C.? Describe this event.

(SE) Page 139:  Who is Dr. Timothy Leary? What is the relationship between the deaths of Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Dr. Leary?

**White Flight**

(SE) This chapter is titled White Flight. What does this mean?

(HP) Page 181:  Research the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany. What tragic event happened during these Olympic games?

**Heaven and Hell**

(HP) Page 206:  The 1.8-million-year-old skull discovered in 1972 is from a group of people called *Pithecanthropus rudolfensis* They were renamed *Homo rudolfensis* in 1986. Whose archaeological team discovered this skull?

**Taking it to the Streets**

(SE) Page 224:  The occupation of Columbia University by students in 1968 was over two main issues. What were these issues?

**Courage is Contagious**

(HP) Page 235:  Governor George Wallace was a controversial figure in U.S. politics. What was the focus of his campaign during the 1972 primary election?

(HP) Page 235:  Letty and her brothers were surprised to learn that a black woman was running for president in 1972. Research this woman and explain her connection to Governor George Wallace.

**Topics for further discussion:**

* Letty mentions her skin, eye, and hair color in addition to her ability to speak Spanish as defects instead of assets. Why is she trying to deny her Hispanic culture?
* What parallels are there between Afton’s house and Letty’s character development in the story?
* Several wars are mentioned throughout the story. What underlying thread is there between the wars and the characters?