

# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR **THE YEAR OF NEEDY GIRLS**

1. What do the houses seem to represent for Deirdre in chapter one? What do they reveal about the way she sees herself and the world?
2. What do the school scenes suggest about the type of teacher Deirdre is? What is her greatest strength? Her weakness?
3. The title refers to Deirdre's students but might also make references to both Deirdre and SJ. What evidence is there in the novel to suggest this is true?
4. In what way(s) are we shaped by the places we're born into? Talk about the various locations in the book: Bradley, Gloucester, Provincetown. How do they function in the novel? What do they represent, especially to Deirdre?
5. Why doesn't SJ tell Deirdre about Mr. Freeman? Do you think this is a mistake? Why or why not?
6. So much of the novel is about fear. Discuss the ways in which fear plays a role in the characters' actions and decisions.
7. What is Deirdre's biggest mistake?
8. Talk about SJ's connection with Mickey Gilberto. Why is she reluctant to see him as guilty?
9. Both SJ and Deirdre have difficulty seeing what is directly in front of them. Discuss their misperceptions and how those misperceptions cloud their judgment.
10. Discuss the omniscient sections scattered throughout the book—those sections labeled "The Girls," for example. What role do they play? Why is it important to hear these various points of view? What might they suggest about the town? About human nature?
11. Why does Leo Rivera's death have such a great impact on Deirdre's life? Do you sympathize with any of the people at the town meeting? Why or why not?
12. Discuss the ending. What does Deirdre finally learn? What does her move to Provincetown suggest about the way she sees herself now?

**THE YEAR OF NEEDY GIRLS** | a novel by **Patricia A. Smith** | **Publication Date: January 3, 2017** | **320 pages** | **Fiction/literature**

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