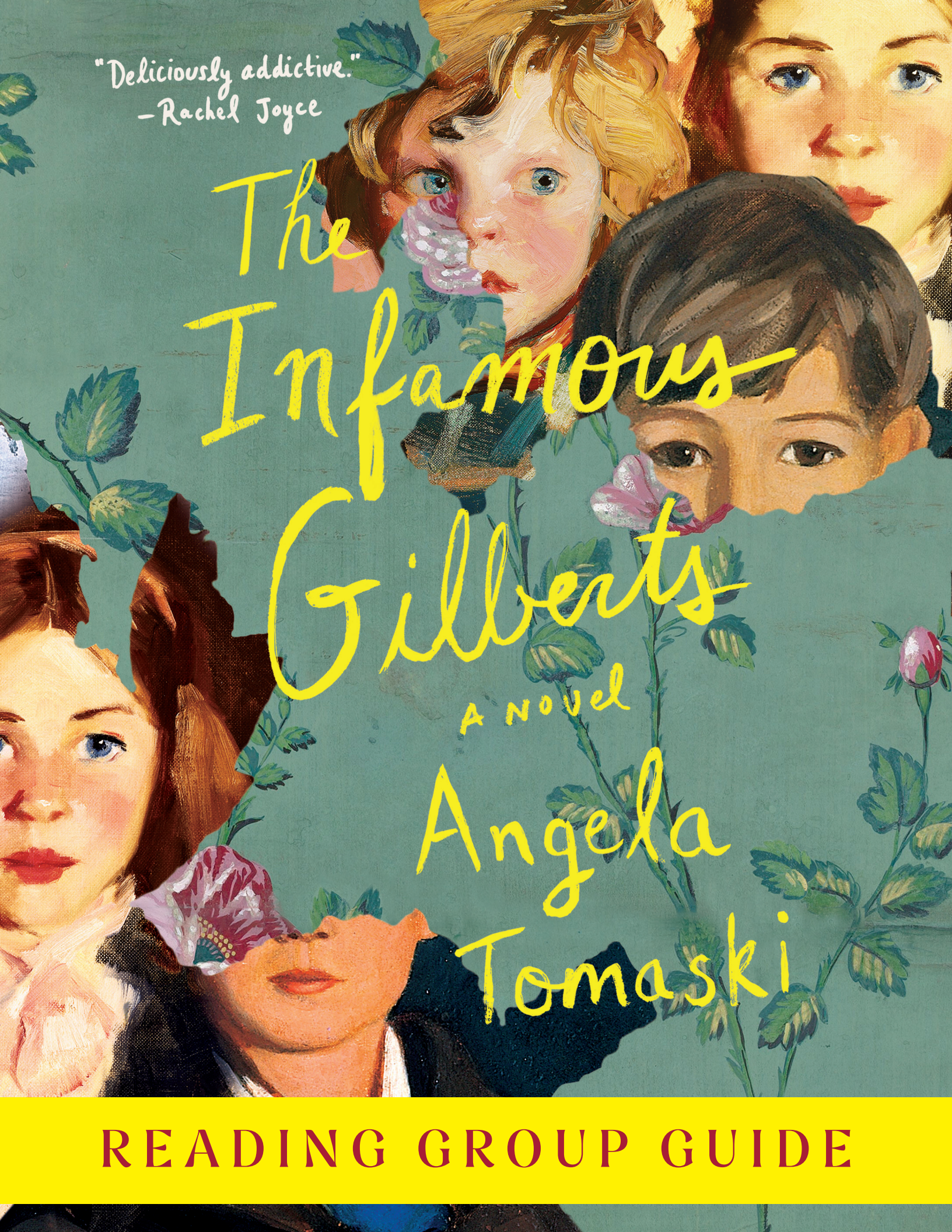




"Deliciously addictive."
—Rachel Joyce

The In Famous Gilberts

A NOVEL

Angela
Tomaski

READING GROUP GUIDE

The Infamous Gilberts

Angela Tomaski

This reading group guide for THE INFAMOUS GILBERTS includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

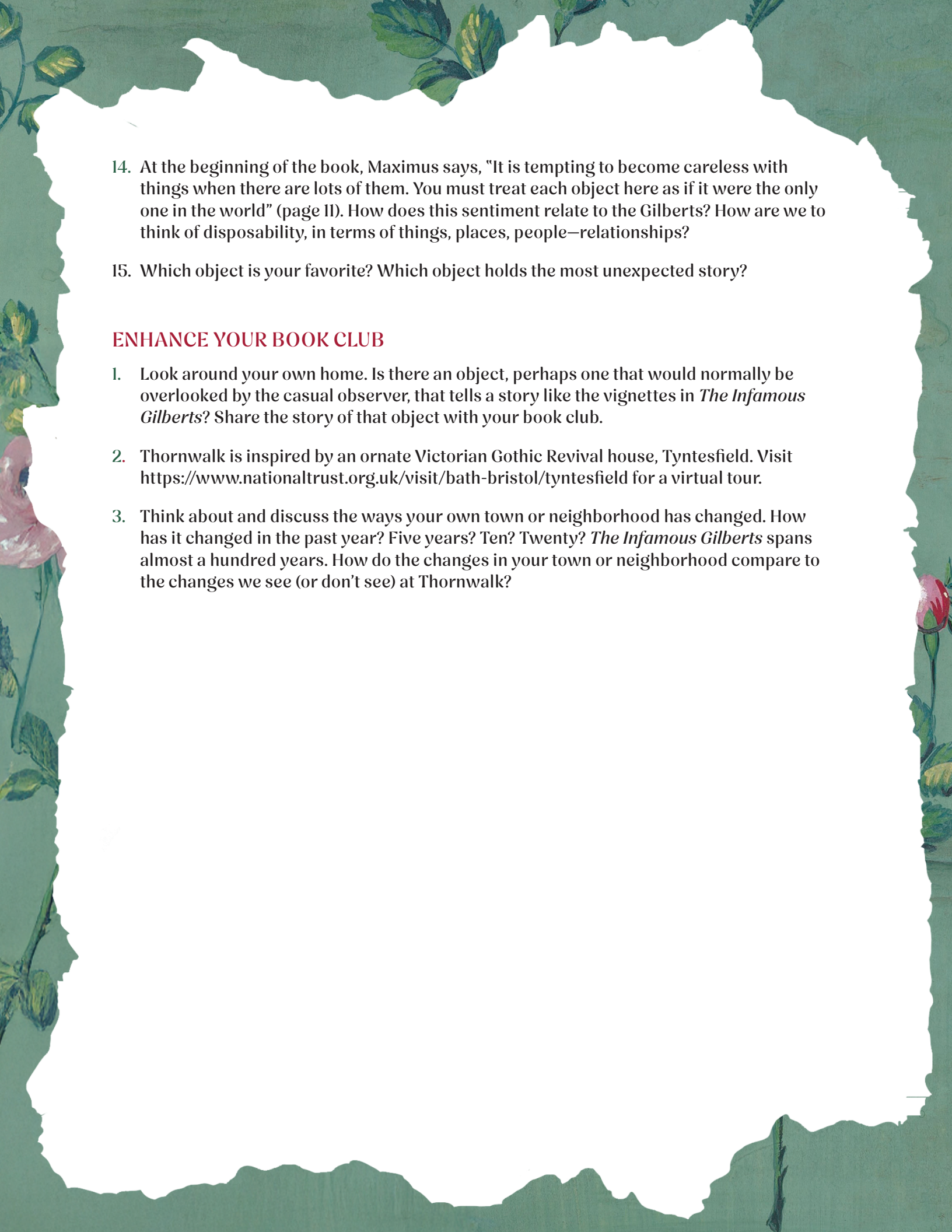
INTRODUCTION

Thornwalk, a once-stately English manor, will never be the same. The keys are being handed over to a luxury hotelier, who will undertake a complete renovation—but in doing so, what will they erase? Through the keen eyes of an enigmatic narrator, the reader is taken on a guided tour into rooms filled with secrets and memories, each revealing a piece of the story of the five Gilbert siblings.

Spanning the eve of World War II to the early 2000s, this contemporary gothic novel weaves a rich tapestry of English country life. As the story unfolds, the reader is drawn into a world where the echoes of an Edwardian idyll clash with the harsh realities of war, neglect, and changing times. The Gilberts' tale is one of great loves, lofty ambitions, and profound loss, and Angela Tomaski's mordantly witty yet loving account is an immersive experience.

TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. On the first page of the book, Hugo tells us he worries about the objects in Thornwalk because "they're not the sort of thing people like these days." What purpose do these objects serve in the story? How might the reader value them?
2. Discuss the Gilbert siblings' relationships to each other and others in their family. What do they prioritize in life? How do their priorities shift as they exit childhood and enter adulthood?
3. Maximus is an omniscient narrator who doubles as a character in the book. How does he care for the Gilberts, both in his narration and outside of it?
4. What did you think of Aunt Beatrice's relationship with Mrs. Gilbert, and her treatment of her nieces and nephews?
5. Discuss Annabel's role in the story. How does she evolve?
6. Hugo "guards their father's memory like the curator of a museum" (page 61). How does he mythologize his father, and himself? How does self-mythologization for any of the Gilberts spell doom at various points in the book?
7. On page 96, Mrs. Gilbert says that it was out of respect for Mr. Gilbert that the bomb in the lake didn't explode, and Maximus tells us this is a lie: "[Mrs. Gilbert] will always remember it and regret it, because it is deliberately dishonest, in a way that most of her other lies haven't been." What do you make of this statement? How does Mrs. Gilbert's style of motherhood influence her children?
8. When Hugo returns from the war, Annabel starts crying because "Hugo is dead" (page 99). In what way is Hugo "dead"? Does he retain any semblance of his younger self?
9. Discuss the Asquills and how they shape the lives of the Gilberts, both materially and psychologically.
10. On page 107, Maximus draws our attention to a story about Hugo and Jeremy in which they work together to rescue a lamb. What is the relevance of this moment?
11. Unrequited love emerges as a major driver of behavior throughout the story. Discuss how various characters suffer through this emotional experience.
12. On page 175, we hear murmurings that, "Something, somewhere, must have gone very wrong in this family." What do you think went wrong for them?
13. On page 235, Rosalind says, "I never chose to do any of the things I did. They just happened." Discuss how the Gilberts take responsibility for their actions (or don't).

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14. At the beginning of the book, Maximus says, "It is tempting to become careless with things when there are lots of them. You must treat each object here as if it were the only one in the world" (page 11). How does this sentiment relate to the Gilberts? How are we to think of disposability, in terms of things, places, people—relationships?
 15. Which object is your favorite? Which object holds the most unexpected story?

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Look around your own home. Is there an object, perhaps one that would normally be overlooked by the casual observer, that tells a story like the vignettes in *The Infamous Gilberts*? Share the story of that object with your book club.
2. Thornwalk is inspired by an ornate Victorian Gothic Revival house, Tyntesfield. Visit <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/bath-bristol/tyntesfield> for a virtual tour.
3. Think about and discuss the ways your own town or neighborhood has changed. How has it changed in the past year? Five years? Ten? Twenty? *The Infamous Gilberts* spans almost a hundred years. How do the changes in your town or neighborhood compare to the changes we see (or don't see) at Thornwalk?