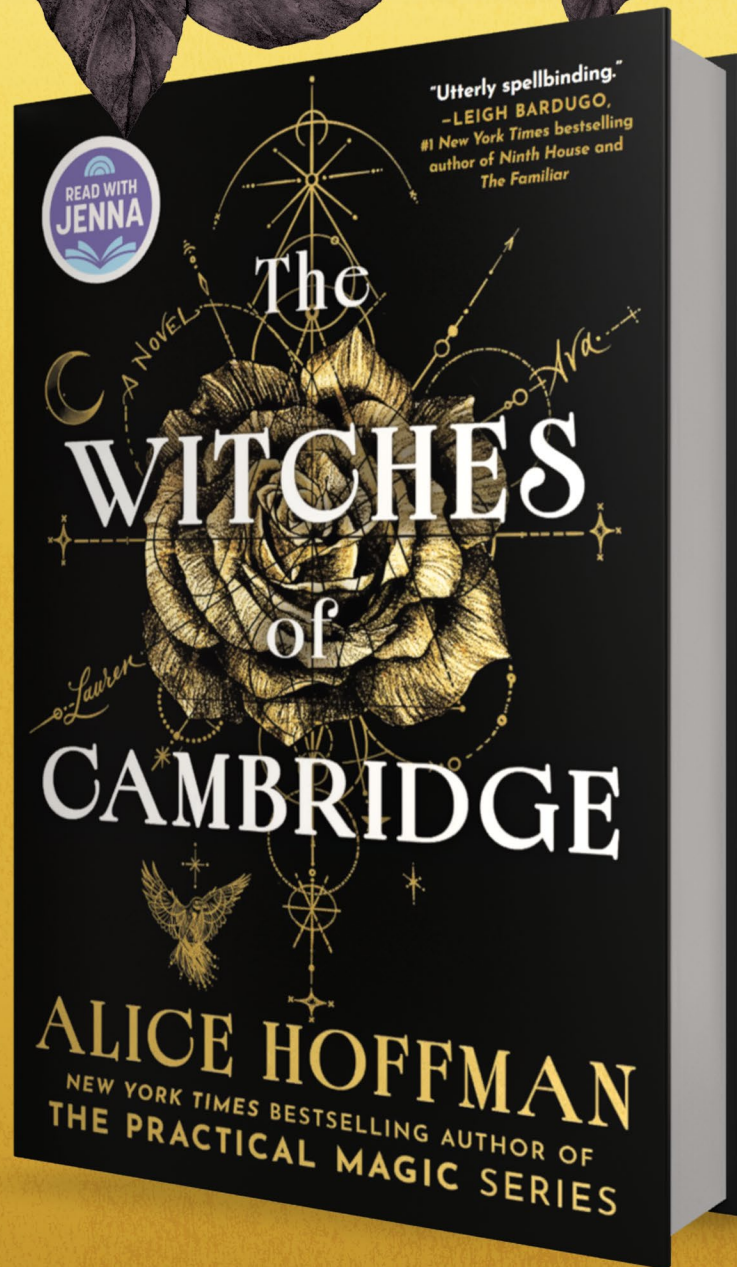




READING GROUP GUIDE

This reading group guide for *The Witches of Cambridge* 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 your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.



INTRODUCTION

This brand-new novel from the bestselling author of *Practical Magic* follows two brilliant young women as they become immersed in a mysterious secret group of witches at Radcliffe known as the Lilith Society.

By the 1950s, Cambridge, Massachusetts, feels far removed from the legendary witch trials that marked its early days as a colony. Ava, a bright young woman from a small town in Maine, arrives for her first year

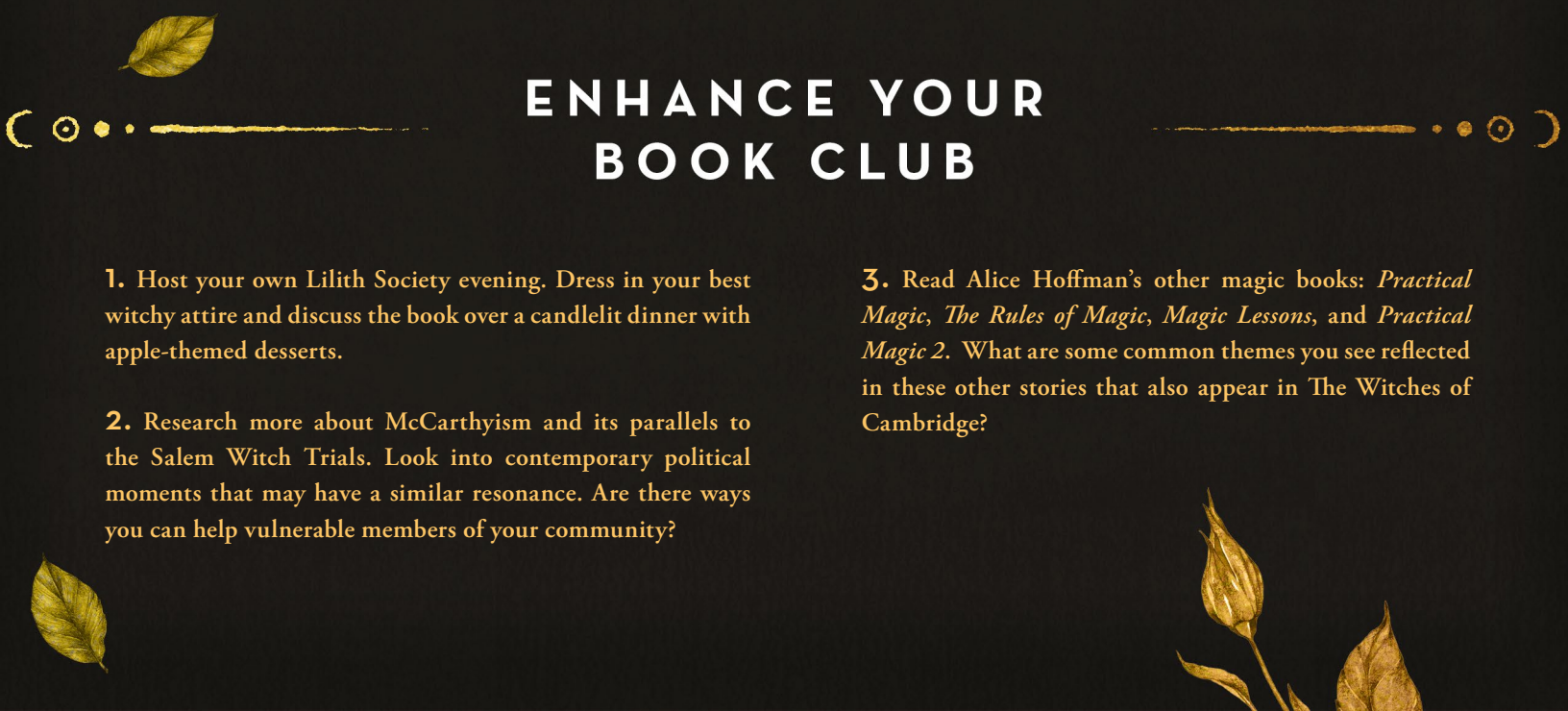
at Radcliffe College. There, she meets Lauren—the wild and brazen daughter of a wealthy and well-established Cambridge family—her opposite in every way. But the two have more in common than they think. Both are recruited by the Lilith Society, a secret organization of witches at Radcliffe dating back to colonial times. As they learn more about their legacy, Ava and Lauren form a close bond that is put to the test as they navigate their new power and friendship.





TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Ava's longing for another life is clear from the moment she appears on the page: "She wanted to be surprised by life, to walk along dark streets and kiss someone as if her life depended upon it" (p. 11). How does Ava's relationship with freedom and agency evolve over the course of the novel?
2. Lauren tells Lionel, "People like us shouldn't ever fall in love" (p. 27). How does Lauren's fear of emotional vulnerability change throughout the story? What allows her to be more vulnerable, and when do we see her the most afraid?
3. Lauren tells Ava that Ava had better learn "the game of appearing normal" (p. 33). What role does conformity play for the characters, magical and non-magical alike, throughout the novel? Which characters succeed at blending in, and which refuse to?
4. Rose, the first witch of Cambridge, writes, "What men don't understand they will seek to destroy" (p. 164). Where do we see the consequences of this play out in the story?
5. Jamie repeatedly struggles with the darkness of his family history. How does his relationship with his legacy shape his journey?
6. The novel draws direct parallels between the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthy-era America. Where do you see these comparisons most clearly? Can similar parallels be drawn to the political climate of today?
7. Discuss the role of the body in this novel. Characters are judged, punished, desired, or feared because of physical traits like sharp teeth, black blood, scars, or extra fingers. How are these traits used to convey a sense of otherness and power?
8. Imagery from the natural world appears throughout the novel: crows, dogs, flowers, rivers, apples, and many more. What role does nature play within the magical world of the story? Which recurring symbols stood out most to you and why?
9. Discuss the relationship between power and knowledge in the novel. Who has access to education, history, and magic—and who is excluded from them?
10. By the end of the novel, which relationship dynamics felt the most meaningful to you: friendship, romance, family bonds, or the connections between generations of women? Why? How do these different relationships overlap or conflict with each other?



ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Host your own Lilith Society evening. Dress in your best witchy attire and discuss the book over a candlelit dinner with apple-themed desserts.
2. Research more about McCarthyism and its parallels to the Salem Witch Trials. Look into contemporary political moments that may have a similar resonance. Are there ways you can help vulnerable members of your community?
3. Read Alice Hoffman's other magic books: *Practical Magic*, *The Rules of Magic*, *Magic Lessons*, and *Practical Magic 2*. What are some common themes you see reflected in these other stories that also appear in *The Witches of Cambridge*?