



The Struggle Within: A Novel by Sarah Whelan

Book Club Discussion Questions

1. Who are your favorite and least favorite characters (other than Beth and José)? Which character did you relate to the most? Which character did you have the hardest time finding a connection with?
2. What do you think of the prisoners' complaints? Do they have merit, or are they groundless? What can the government, the criminal justice system, or your average citizen do to address them?
3. If Beth had chosen to walk away from the prison grounds on the first day, how might that have impacted the outcome? Would the results have been better, worse, or the same?
4. *In the Struggle Within*, we see events through Beth's and José's eyes. If you could hear this same story from another person's point of view, who would you choose?
5. Beth made mistakes, somewhere along the way, in her interactions with inmates. What were they? Have you ever made mistakes like this? Have you seen others make mistakes like these? What impact did they have?
6. How does Beth change over the course of the story? Does she become stronger or weaker? Less compassionate or more?
7. Warden Hayward is a supporting character in the novel, but he seems to play a prominent part in the story. Were you drawn in by his complexities? Did his traits and actions make you like him or hate him? How do you feel about his infidelity? What was his influence over Beth?
8. What did you learn, if anything, about prisoners? How are they like—or unlike—people around you?

9. Did the story change your opinion or perspective about prisoners? Correctional officers? Law enforcement officers and administrators?
10. Were Frederick Douglass' speeches interpreted and/or applied appropriately by Beth, José, and the other prisoners?
11. How do you read Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*? Do you agree with José's translation of the word "difference," or do you think the traditional interpretation of the poem is correct?
12. If *The Struggle Within* were being adapted into a movie, what actors would you want to see play what parts?
13. How do you feel about Beth's relationship with her father? What impact do you think that relationship had on Beth's life choices? On her actions before, during, and after the riot? Was her father's final act a surprise, or did you know it all along?
14. How do you feel about the ending? What did you like, what did you not like, and what do you wish had been different? Where do you think Beth goes from here? What about the other characters?