

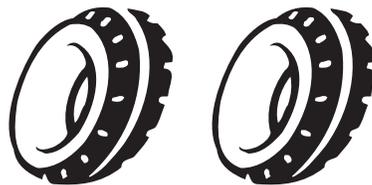
DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Silent Patient

by Alex Michaelides

BOOK GROUP

≡≡≡ *Take-Out* ≡≡≡



DEKALB
COUNTY
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

a place to grow

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Alex Michaelides was born and raised in Cyprus. He has an M.A. in English Literature from Trinity College, Cambridge University, and an M.A. in Screenwriting from the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. *The Silent Patient* was his first novel, debuting at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and has sold more than 6.5 million copies worldwide. The rights have been sold in a record-breaking 51 countries, and the book has been optioned for film by Plan B. His second novel, *The Maidens*, was an instant *New York Times* bestseller and has been optioned for television by Miramax Television and Stone Village.

BOOK SUMMARY

Alicia Berenson's life is seemingly perfect. A famous painter married to an in-demand fashion photographer, she lives in a grand house with big windows overlooking a park in one of London's most desirable areas. One evening her husband Gabriel returns home late from a fashion shoot, and Alicia shoots him five times in the face, and then never speaks another word.

Alicia's refusal to talk, or give any kind of explanation, turns a domestic tragedy into something far grander, a mystery that captures the public imagination and casts Alicia into notoriety. The price of her art skyrockets, and she, the silent patient, is hidden away from the tabloids and spotlight at the Grove, a secure forensic unit in North London.

Theo Faber is a criminal psychotherapist who has waited a long time for the opportunity to work with Alicia. His determination to get her to talk and unravel the mystery of why she shot her husband takes him down a twisting path into his own motivations—a search for the truth that threatens to consume him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This story is told by using pieces of Alicia's diary and also through narration by Theo, with both past and present intertwining. Did having the two timelines work or did you find it confusing? Why or why not?
3. The story begins with the revelation that Alicia murdered her husband. Why do you think the author made this admission at the very start?
4. How would you describe Alicia Berenson and the life she has led up to the time she kills her husband? What was your initial sense of why Alicia refused to speak?
5. Alicia's diary plays a key role in the book. What purpose do you think it serves? And does your perception of Alicia change the more you read?
6. Alicia's silence is related to the Greek myth of Alcestis. Why do you think the author included this reference to Greek mythology, and what does it add to your experience of the story? How do you feel about the story of the myth?

7. Theo's motives for working with Alicia are complicated. Do you think he wanted to help her? Or did he want something else?
8. Both Alicia and Theo had difficult childhoods. Early on, Theo says no one is born evil. That who we become depends on the environment into which we are born. By the end of the novel he appears to change his mind, saying that perhaps some of us are born evil, and, despite therapy, we remain that way. Which do you think is true? Why?
9. Do you think the world of a psychiatric unit was convincingly portrayed? How do you feel about Diomedes and the other psychiatrists?
10. The author once took a post-grad course in psychotherapy and subsequently spent a couple of years working part-time in a psychiatric unit like the Grove. What does Michaelides mean when, in 2018, he said in an interview with the Bookseller... "I saw how the world of psychotherapy might be the perfect modern setting to reimagine [Alcestis'] story and explore its themes of death, guilt and silence." Mentor Public Library Page 3 of 4 November 2021
11. This book plays with the idea of trustworthiness, with characters seeming reliable one moment and unreliable the next. What were the elements that made you trust certain characters or not?
12. How did you feel about the dynamic between Theo and Alicia and between Theo and Ruth as therapist and patient? What lines should or shouldn't be crossed in these relationship? What power dynamics are at play here?
13. We never enter Kathy's mind in the book. Do you have any sympathy for her?
14. How did you feel about Theo and Kathy's marriage? What are your thoughts on how their relationship is resolved?
15. What do you think of Theo, initially, as he begins to work with Alicia? What do you come to understand about him, and his motivation, as the book unfolds? In what way does your view of Theo change?
16. Were you shocked by the big reveal at the end? Or did you see it coming? When did you figure out the twist and what were the clues that led you there?
17. What do you think happens at the end of the book? The last line is ambiguous.
18. Who do you think is to blame for Gabriel's death?

**For a complete list of Book Group Take-Out titles, go to
dekalblibrary.org/book-group-take-out**