

The background of the image is a textured blue rectangle with ornate, dark blue scrollwork in each corner. This rectangle is set against a larger background that features a painting of a village with colorful houses and trees at the bottom, and abstract blue and green brushstrokes at the top.

PRINTABLE
Book Club Kit

Turning Toward Eden

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Welcome

Welcome to the discussion guide for *Turning Toward Eden*. Set in a small California coastal town in the early 1970s, this coming-of-age story follows fourteen-year-old Eden Lewis as she grapples with family upheaval, Cold War suspicion, and escalating rumors. With the novel's retro vibes and layered narrative threads, you may feel nostalgic for your own youth. As you work through the kit, use the story as a lens through which to reflect on your own coming of age.

While the novel itself contains thought-provoking discussion questions (in the back matter), this guide is specifically designed to help your book club laugh, share stories, and think together about faith, family, forgiveness, and the quiet work of grace. Use as many or as few questions as fit your time.

Alternate Resources

- *Reader Discussion Guide*: A short guide included in every copy of the novel. Ideal for individual readers and casual book discussions.
- *Expanded Discussion Guide*: A deeper exploration of the novel's themes, characters, symbolism, historical setting, and faith elements. Perfect for book clubs, libraries, and classrooms. Available as Free PDF at catetouryan.com.

How to Use This Guide

- Read one grouped section (or two) together before meeting.
- Start with the one-sentence orienting summary to set the scene.
- Let everyone share answers—no one needs to be “right.”
- Use the optional activity for a quick, fun change of pace.
- Keep conversation kind and curious; it's okay to disagree.
- End with the whole-book questions when you finish the novel.

Chapters 1–3: The Pier, the Baptism, and the Vanishing Girl

Eden's impulsive attempt to baptize Hollis is interrupted by the mysterious vanishing off the pier of the rumored Soviet girl, Raven, pulling Eden into small-town gossip and her own questions about belonging and faith.

Discussion Questions

1. What impression does the initial sighting of Raven on the pier leave on you as a reader, and how does it set expectations for the atmosphere of the story?
2. What does Eden's insistence on baptizing Hollis reveal about her understanding of faith, control, or redemption at this point in her life?
3. Hollis remains calm and good-natured after Eden dunks him in the ocean. How does his reaction contrast with Eden's temperament, and what does this show about the dynamic between them?
4. Why does Anna share the story of the chicken with Eden? What does this exchange reveal about how well he understands her?
5. Eden repeats the phrase "*Them*, not me" during her retelling of Raven's story to Hollis. What does this recurring refrain suggest about her character at this stage?
6. Much of the humor in these opening chapters comes from Eden's highly original, slightly scrambled theological ideas (like her sudden urge to baptize Hollis). How does this blend of humor and earnestness shape your connection to her voice, and what does it suggest about how she is trying to make sense of the world?
7. *Looking Back*: Can you recall a time in your own youth when gossip, a first impression, or peer opinion heavily influenced how you viewed someone? Looking back, how did that initial perception measure up to who they actually were?

Optional Activity

First Impressions: Share your first impression of Eden. What stood out to you most?

Chapters 4–6: Family Burdens and Church Drama

As Eden struggles with the demands of caring for Dex and the lingering hurt of her father's absence, a memorable Sunday at church finds her caught in a collision of shame, anger, and guilt.

Discussion Questions

1. The author uses everyday household details, such as the “Leaning Tower of Pampers,” to depict Eden’s home life. Which of these domestic descriptions stood out to you, and what do they convey about the daily reality in their household?
2. How does Mama’s approach to her faith and family responsibilities compare to Eden’s? What different mechanisms of coping or strength does each rely on?
3. What does Eden’s sudden decision to smash the wasp reveal about the connection between her feelings for Dex and her reaction to the gossip around her? How does this moment highlight her battle between impulse and decorum?
4. How has Eden’s father’s departure influenced the way she views church, faith, and the adults around her?
5. How does the father’s attitude toward Dex contrast with Eden’s and Mama’s? What do these differences suggest about each character’s capacity to accept things they cannot control?
6. *Looking Back*: Recall a time in your own youth when you carried responsibilities that felt unusually heavy for your age—or perhaps you knew someone who did. How did bearing those adult-sized burdens shape your perspective of the world around you?

Optional Activity

Family Portrait: Which family member (Eden, Mama, Dex, or Eden’s father) do you find most interesting so far and why? Share your thoughts with the group.

Chapters 7–9: Rev. Travers, the Caladrius, and Rosa

Eden recounts her first conversation with Rev. Travers, reads about the mythical caladrius while waiting for Rosa to arrive, and then details Rosa’s introduction to the family.

Discussion Questions

1. Mama apologizes to Eden after church. What is she sorry for, and why does she choose this moment? How does her apology reflect their family dynamic?
2. Rev. Travers notes that his coming from Tennessee, Mama from Louisiana, and Eden from Texas means they “understand each other.” What regional, cultural, or spiritual undercurrents do these places share that might make his observation ring true?
3. Following the disruption at church, Rev. Travers assigns Eden a highly specific, unusual task. How do you interpret his response? Why does he choose this path rather than a more traditional form of discipline?
4. According to the legend Eden reads, the caladrius has the power to absorb sickness or turn away from it. Based on what we’ve seen of Eden’s life and her relationship with Dex, how does this mythical bird serve as a symbol for her current situation?
5. Eden says that Dex has “special needs,” while Rosa argues, “This child same all other childs.” How do these contrasting views reveal their different perspectives?
6. Compare Rosa’s outward, visceral expressions of piety with Eden’s inward, complex relationship with faith. How do these characters practice their understanding of who God is and their obligation to him?
7. *Looking Back*: Eden observes, “And the way I saw it, a thing became a noose only when it was forced on you, the way Dex had been forced on me.” Were there times in your own youth when you felt strangled by a specific duty or family expectation? Do you view those responsibilities differently now?

Optional Activity

Symbol Spotlight: What symbol from literature, faith, mythology, or even everyday life has stayed with you over the years? Share what it represents and why it has stayed meaningful.

Chapters 10–12: Gulch Run, the Church Vandalism, and First Suspicions

Eden sneaks into Gulch Run, discovers the vandalism at St. Francis, and finds herself increasingly drawn into the town's suspicions about Raven.

Discussion Questions

1. What do Eden's early assumptions about Raven reveal about her own needs and fears at this point in the story? Why might having a clear culprit feel safer to her than having no answers at all?
2. How does the physical description of Gulch Run contrast with the main parts of Harford Beach? How does this environmental divide mirror the social and economic divisions in the town?
3. How does Father Miguel react to the vandalism at St. Francis, and how does his response compare to the reactions of the other adults Eden interacts with?
4. The hammer-and-sickle symbol spray-painted on the church wall elevates the town's anxiety. Why does this specific symbol carry so much weight in Harford Beach, and how does it shift the nature of the accusations against Raven?
5. Even as the town's suspicion of Raven intensifies, are there details or moments in these chapters that cause you to doubt the prevailing community narrative?
6. Because we experience the story entirely through Eden's first-person perspective, we see only what she chooses to focus on. How does this narrative choice affect your own willingness to believe the rumors, and how does it build suspense?
7. *Looking Back*: Have you ever lived in or visited a tight-knit community where a strong collective mindset made it difficult for an outsider to be accepted? Looking back, how did the group's shared assumptions shape how people behaved?

Optional Activity

Picture This: If the novel were adapted into a film, who would you cast as Eden, Hollis, Rev. Travers, and Father Miguel? Why?

Chapters 13–15: Jake and Anna, Eden’s Father, and the Seal Pup

Eden reflects on Jake and his sister Anna before a storm hits, thwarting her plans to investigate Gulch Run. After the storm passes, her father comes to visit, a baby seal is found dead on the beach, and Eden is left with more questions than answers.

Discussion Questions

1. Jake’s illness is handled with a balance of humor and tenderness. How does this specific tone shape your view of his relationship with Eden and Anna?
2. When Eden’s father suddenly reappears, we see very different reactions from Eden and her mother. What do these contrasting responses reveal about how each of them is processing his past departure and his sudden presence now?
3. Eden’s father expresses friendliness toward Dex during his visit. How do you interpret this warmth, given his decision to leave the family? How does this interaction complicate Eden’s view of him?
4. Finding the dead seal pup on the beach is a harsh, physical reality. How does encountering this tangible loss affect Eden differently from hearing the ongoing, abstract rumors circulating in town?
5. While Eden is driven to chase leads and find answers, Hollis consistently refuses to investigate rumors. How does his steady approach contrast with Eden’s urgency in these chapters, and what does it reveal about their differing ways of navigating uncertainty?
6. *Looking Back*: Can you point to adults in your life who made you feel “less than” or whose disapproval felt obvious? As time passed, did your understanding of their behavior or your own perceptions change?

Optional Activity

Favorite Moment Vote: Which scene in these chapters stood out most to you and why?

Chapters 16–18: The Shed, Second Breakfast, and the Evening Walk

Eden discovers evidence in Raven’s shed, overhears an alarming conversation between Vince and Heather, and then returns home to find her father still there.

Discussion Questions

1. When Eden finds the red spray paint and ammunition in the shed, she treats them as confirmation of her theories. How do these objects cement her suspicion, and what does this show about how we gather “proof” when we’ve already pegged a culprit?
2. Overhearing Vince and Heather at the ravine introduces new information. How does this conversation complicate Eden’s understanding of the crimes in town, and where does it disrupt the theories she has built up so far?
3. Eden’s father insists he had no choice but to leave, yet he keeps coming back to the house. How do you interpret his explanations for leaving, and who does he seem to hold responsible for the state of the family?
4. Eden remarks, “I had never hated green apples so much.” What is the connection between this specific physical trigger and her father’s presence in the kitchen, and why is this sensory detail so potent for her?
5. Throughout the novel, lines from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven” echo in Eden’s mind. In these chapters, how do those poetic fragments mirror the specific fears and unanswered questions she is carrying?
6. Between her father’s visits, her Dex “duties,” and the escalating suspicions of Raven, Eden feels pulled in multiple directions. Which of these issues seems to demand the most from her in this section, and why?
7. *Looking Back:* As you’ve gotten older, has a relationship with a parent or other family member become rockier—or smoother—with time? What changed?

Optional Activity

Quick Reaction Round: Eden has just made two big discoveries (at the shed and ravine). Which would make you more nervous if you were in her shoes? What would you do next?

Chapters 19–21: Parent Conflict, Mayor Mac’s Story, and the Broken Chain

After conflict sparks between Eden’s parents, Eden sneaks out to the poker game, hears more rumors, and later discovers Rev. Travers searching for his son.

Discussion Questions

1. When Eden faces her father at the rental, she resists engaging with him before finally agreeing to a game of poker. What does this shift reveal about their relationship, and how do her feelings about her mother’s response influence the interaction?
2. What does Anna’s news about the seal reveal about how rumors spread in the town?
3. In her dream, Eden experiences a vivid, surreal sequence of events. What specific fears or desires from her waking life seem to surface in this dream?
4. When Eden remarks that Ben isn’t lost if he’s with Vince, Rev. Travers asks, “Isn’t he?” How does Eden’s definition of being “lost” differ from the reverend’s?
5. What does Rev. Travers mean when he says, “The wrong things mattered”? Is his regret limited to his parenting of Ben, or does it apply to the wider community?
6. Eden struggles to believe that her brother is wonderfully made and that she is wonderfully loved, thinking, “Then why did my father leave us?” How has her father’s departure shaped her sense of self-worth and her feelings toward Dex?
7. Eden and Rev. Travers hold very different views on the purpose and possibility of forgiveness. Which of their perspectives did you find more compelling, and why?
8. *Looking Back:* Eden’s struggle to understand her worth is tied directly to her father’s decision to leave. Looking back at your own adolescence, did you ever carry the weight of an adult’s choices or absence? How did that shape the way you viewed yourself or the people you felt responsible for protecting?

Optional Activity

Character Compass: Choose one character from these chapters and describe that character in three words. Compare choices and discuss any surprising differences.

Chapters 22–24: The Fire, the Scrapbook, the Dance, and the Gun

After Eden hears about the fire and tracks Raven to the dinghy, Raven allows Eden a glimpse into her past, and the real story behind the rumors begins to surface.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the fire in the shed challenge Eden's existing beliefs about Vince and Ben? How does it affect her suspicions about Raven?
2. Why do you think Raven waits for Eden at the dock instead of simply disappearing?
3. How does watching Raven's dance on the beach change Eden's perception of her? What does this performance suggest about Raven's relationship with her own past?
4. Eden begins to wonder if she's been wrong about Raven. Why is admitting the possibility so difficult for her?
5. How does the contrast between the faded ballet photos in the scrapbook and the immediate, physical danger of the gun complicate Eden's understanding of Raven?
6. *Looking Back:* When Eden finally sees Raven as a real person with a real past, she struggles to revise the convenient story she's constructed in her head. Have you ever built up a strong, negative assumption about someone, only to have a single, unexpected revelation completely shatter it? What did it feel like to admit your first impression was wrong?

Optional Activity

Raven's Ledger: List three things Raven has lost and three things she is still fighting to protect. Discuss as a group.

Chapters 25–37: Return from the Caves, Illness, and the Carnival’s Arrival

Eden’s return from the Pirate Caves with Raven leaves her shaken and sick. After she recovers, she seeks Hollis’s help in investigating the Pirate Caves, but her plans are derailed by the carnival’s coming to town.

Discussion Questions

1. On their return from the Pirate Caves, Raven offers Eden a camellia, which Eden flings to the ground. Why won’t she accept it? What do both the gesture and its refusal reveal about their relationship?
2. When Eden asks why Raven wanted to show her the caves, Hollis suggests, “Maybe . . . maybe she figured it was the only way you’d stop.” What does Hollis understand about the nature of Eden’s search that Eden herself is still blind to?
3. Eden insists she is “chasing the truth,” but Hollis challenges her: “Sure you’re not running from it?” What truth might Eden be avoiding, and how does her silence with Hollis about the cave encounter reflect this fear?
4. Why is it so vital to Raven that Eden finally know her real name, Liliya? What does this shift in identity cost both of them?
5. Rosa insists that Dex “know the heart.” How has Dex shown this unique insight, and why is Rosa’s perspective so unlike that of the other adults in Eden’s life?
6. The arrival of the carnival means Hollis is too busy to help Eden investigate the caves. What do you make of Eden’s irritation? How does this disruption highlight her dependency on Hollis, and what does it reveal about her urgency to find answers?
7. *Looking Back*: Liliya fights to be seen for who she actually is rather than as the “Raven” persona the town constructed. Has a a label, rumor, or expectation ever been forced onto you? How did you reclaim your real name or identity?

Optional Activity

Two-Minute Takeaway Round: Share one sentence about what you now understand about Raven that you didn’t before.

Chapters 28–30: Threats, Suspects, and an Invitation

Vince and Ben suspect Eden of being Raven’s accomplice. She discusses the escalating situation with a concerned Hollis and then has a run-in with Heather and Trish, who invite her to the carnival. When she declines the invitation, Heather threatens her and tells her to meet her at the Ferris wheel.

Discussion Questions

1. In their encounter with Anna and Eden, Vince and Ben reveal friction beneath their friendship. What do you make of their tense dynamic, and what does it suggest about the nature of their relationship?
2. Vince has been an intriguing, slightly dangerous mystery to Eden, but as Anna probes him, something shifts in Eden’s perception. Then it shifts again as he becomes threatening. How does Eden’s view of Vince change? Of Ben?
3. Why does Eden choose to keep Hollis in the dark about the fact that he is a suspect, too? Is she protecting him, protecting herself, or does she have another motive?
4. Hollis points out a one-legged pigeon. What do you think this bird symbolizes in relation to Eden or the broader themes of survival and resilience?
5. Heather shifts rapidly from friendly invitation to flat-out threat when Eden declines. What does this sudden shift suggest about the social hierarchies in Harford Beach and how power is used in this town?
6. *Looking Back*: Eden is forced to navigate sudden shifts in her peers—from Vince’s escalating hostility to Heather’s rapid turn from friend to threat. Can you recall a time in your adolescence when a social circle or a peer relationship suddenly changed, revealing a side of someone you hadn’t seen before? How did you handle that sudden shift in dynamic, and what did it teach you about trust?

Optional Activity

Suspicion Check: Without overthinking it, name who you think is the most suspicious character at this point in the story and give one reason why.

Chapters 31–33: Eden’s Promise, the Ferris Wheel, and Mounting Danger

Eden promises Dex she’ll return for him and then goes to meet Heather, who orders Eden to ride the Ferris wheel with her. On the Ferris wheel, hidden truths explode, and Eden must act fast to protect her brother.

Discussion Questions

1. Knowing the risks, Eden still chooses to meet Heather at the carnival. If you were in her shoes, would you have gone? Do you view her decision as brave, foolish, or something else entirely?
2. What does Eden’s internal conflict about leaving Dex reveal about her growth—or lack of it?
3. On the Ferris wheel, Eden is physically trapped while Heather confronts her. How does the setting of a high, moving ride mirror the sudden shift in what Eden knows versus what she is powerless to control?
4. When Dex suddenly appears in the crowd below, the tension peaks. Why is his presence there the ultimate nightmare for Eden in this specific moment, and how does it change her priorities?
5. *Looking Back*: Eden’s panic on the Ferris wheel is visceral. Have you ever ignored your own instincts or felt trapped by a choice you made because you wanted answers or approval? Looking back, what would you tell your younger self?

Optional Activity

Two-Minute Action Plan: If you were Eden, what would you do the moment the Ferris wheel stopped? Share your thoughts with the group.

Chapters 34–36: The Pier Climax, Liliya’s Story, and Loss

Eden races to save Dex, and Raven disappears. Anna’s revelation about Raven’s past brings the full picture into focus, and Jake’s last ocean walk forces Eden to confront grief.

Discussion Questions

1. When Eden refuses to let anyone approach Dex, claiming, “He’s mine,” she stands in sharp contrast to the frantic crowd. What does this fierce moment of protection reveal about how her view of Dex—and her responsibility to him—has transformed?
2. Eden notes that if Raven had donned the white wings of the caladrius in that moment, she wouldn’t have even seen it. What is the significance of Eden associating Raven with this legendary healing bird at the cusp of Dex’s rescue?
3. How does learning the tragic truth of Raven’s (Liliya’s) past challenge the rumors that gripped Harford Beach? In what ways does this revelation force Eden to confront her own complicity in keeping those rumors alive?
4. How does the crisis on the pier redefine Eden’s reliance on the community around her—specifically through Joe’s abrupt change in attitude and Hollis’s steady loyalty?
5. After the crisis on the pier, the story places us back at Cappy’s for a poker game, where Anna provides the missing pieces. How does her account reframe the events?
6. What does Eden’s decision to finally start wearing her glasses again symbolize about how she is choosing to look at herself and her world?
7. What does Hollis mean by, “He knows he just has to wait long enough”? How does this idea help both Hollis and Eden process the grief shadowing these chapters?
8. *Looking Back*: Eden is forced to grow up suddenly, claiming her brother as her own and confronting the harsh reality of grief. Can you recall a moment in your youth when a crisis or loss forced you to step up, set aside your own worries, and carry someone else? How did that moment change the way you viewed your strength?

Optional Activity

Suspense Spotlight: What moment had you holding your breath more than any other?

Chapter 37: The Echo of Summer and a Shift of Seasons

On a clear October morning, Eden and Hollis sit with Popeye and quietly turn toward what comes next.

Discussion Questions

1. Compare this quiet October morning on the beach to the chaotic pier scene in Chapter 1. How does Eden's physical and mental state in this final scene reflect her growth since she first baptized Hollis in the ocean?
2. The egret's flight in the closing scene is a quiet but powerful visual. How does the bird's presence tie into the novel's theme, and what does its flight symbolize?
3. By the novel's end, what has Eden learned about the difference between forcing an outcome (like her early attempts at baptism) and simply waiting for things to unfold?
4. What does the banter between Eden and Hollis in their final conversation reveal about the evolving nature of their relationship?
5. The ending is hopeful but inconclusive. Based on the deep bonds forged through these crises, what do you envision next for the future of Eden, Dex, and Hollis?
6. *Looking Back*: Think back to a summer or school year in your own adolescence that felt like a major turning point. When the dust finally settled, did you experience a quiet moment of clarity—like Eden and Hollis on the beach—where you realized you had changed? What did “turning toward” your next chapter look like?

Optional Activity

One-Word Takeaway: What word describes how you feel about the ending? Why?

Whole-Book Discussion Questions

1. How do you interpret the title *Turning Toward Eden* in light of the entire journey? Who or what is “turning,” and toward what? What does that movement represent?
2. Which character’s growth felt the most significant or hard-earned to you by the end of the novel, and what specific turning points drove that transformation?
3. How does the novel explore the way a community constructs its own version of the truth? What makes rumors so powerful in Harford Beach, and what does it take to shatter them?
4. How is faith portrayed throughout the novel when it isn’t being expressed through formal church services or sermons? Which characters live out their beliefs most quietly, and what impact does that have on Eden?
5. How does the novel navigate the idea that loving someone—whether a family member, a friend, or a partner—sometimes requires waiting, letting go, or accepting what you cannot fix?
6. Throughout the book, characters grapple with keeping secrets to protect themselves or others. What does the story ultimately suggest about the cost of staying silent versus the risk of speaking up?
7. How do the competing demands of family responsibility and the desire for personal freedom resolve by the final chapter? Does Eden find a way to balance both?
8. The ending of the novel offers hope without wrapping everything up in a neat, perfect bow. Why is this realistic resolution important for Eden’s story, and what does it suggest about her future?
9. If you could sit down with Eden at the very end of the book and ask her one question about her journey or her future, what would you ask her?
10. How has spending time with the residents of Harford Beach—particularly those on the margins, like Dex or Raven—challenged or shifted the way you perceive social boundaries and community divisions within your own community?

Closing

As we close our time together, remember that every story leaves us with a choice: to stay where we are or to turn toward something better. Thank you for the honest conversations, the laughter, and the willingness to walk through Harford Beach with Eden. May we all keep turning toward what is true, good, and beautiful.

Thank you for reading *Turning Toward Eden*.



Turning Toward Eden comes with a **FREE** short story prequel, available as an e-book and audiobook! (Also includes discussion questions.)

A Short Story Adventure for YA and Adults

“We ain’t supposed to go into the woods!”

“We ain’t,” twelve-year-old Jake retorts. “I am.”

Anna might be scared of poison oak, rattlers, and the occasional mountain lion, but not Jake. And the outlaw on the run—why, that was last year.

“The Gulch Run Gangster” is a hair-raising life-or-death adventure set in 1910 California. Despite his younger sister’s warning, Jake treks to the tree fort anyway, where the distant bark of a frantic dog and billowing smoke plunge both children into peril.

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