

FOLGER BOOK CLUB



Discussion Questions: *Symphony of Secrets*

Folger Book Club—February 2025

1. What did you think of this novel? If asked, what would you say this book is about?
2. Did you prefer the contemporary or historical storyline?
3. On page 176, Bern reflects on his deep personal connection to Frederick Delaney. Is there an artist you feel similarly about? To what extent do you equate the artist with the art? Or is it as Slocumb writes on page 187, “No matter who’d written it, no matter the circumstances nor the languages, the music itself transcended all.”
4. How much does it matter to Josephine that her music is heard? What alternate history do you imagine for her if she hadn’t met Freddy?
5. Initially, Freddy does contribute to the music he sells through providing lyrics. Do you see lyrics and music as equally important? Why or why not? Is there a song that you feel is particularly reliant on one or the other?
6. What is Josephine’s relationship to music compared to Freddy’s? What role does it play in each of their lives? How does it change through the course of the novel, or does it?
7. When they are in Europe, Josephine overhears a conversation between Freddy and his team about accommodations. Do you agree with Josephine’s interpretation that Freddy is standing up for her in this moment? Why or why not?
8. Bern and Eboni uncover Josephine’s identity as the true composer of the work previously credited to Frederick, but much of her story remains undiscovered in the present timeline. Are you satisfied by how much they were able to learn? Do the absences make you wonder about what we might be missing when we think of history today?
9. Josephine finds inspiration from everyday sounds as well as listening to the work of other musicians across a variety of genres. Similarly, Shakespeare often borrowed from other sources. Where is the line between inspiration and collaboration? Appropriation and adaptation?
10. Were you surprised by the extremity of the Delaney Foundation’s response to Bern and Eboni’s work? If you had been on the board, how would you have handled their discoveries?