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**Suggested Reads**

*Graveyard Shift* by M.L. Rio

*The Doctors Blackwell* by Janice Nimura

*My Name is Mary Sutter* by Robin Oliveira

*Protecting Her Heart* by Nancy Campbell Allen

*The Way of All Flesh* by Ambrose Perry

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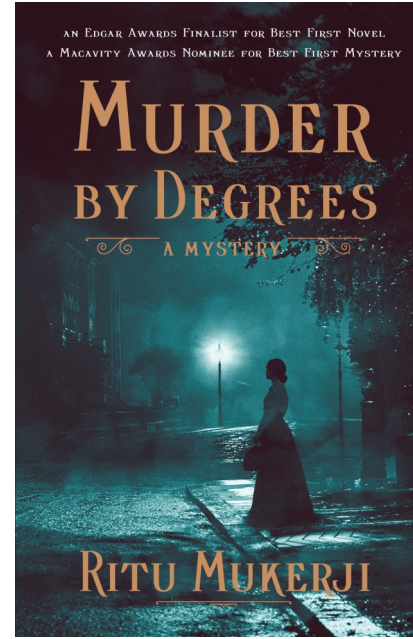
A NOVEL IDEA 2025

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## Discussion Guide

### *Murder by Degrees*



Philadelphia, 1875: It is the start of term at Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. Dr. Lydia Weston, professor and anatomist, is immersed in teaching her students in the lecture hall and hospital. When the body of a patient, Anna Ward, is dredged out of the Schuylkill River, the young chambermaid's death is deemed suicide. But Lydia is suspicious, and she is soon brought into the police investigation. Aided

by a diary filled with cryptic passages of poetry, Lydia discovers more about the young woman she thought she knew. Through her skill at the autopsy table and her clinical acumen, Lydia draws nearer the truth. Soon a terrible secret, long hidden, will be revealed. But Lydia must act quickly before she becomes the next target of those who wished to silence Anna.



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## Discussion Topics

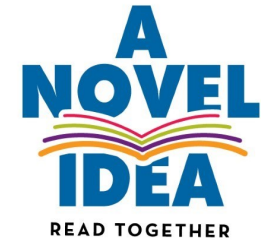
- What motivates Dr. Lydia Weston in her investigation of Anna Ward's death? How do her professional and personal experiences shape her character?
- Discuss Lydia's relationships with her students, colleagues, and the police. How do these interactions reflect the power dynamics of the time?
- How do themes of family, loyalty, and betrayal manifest in the novel? How do they drive the plot and reveal deeper aspects of the characters?
- How does Anna's diary develop her character? How does your perception of her change as you see more of her entries?
- How do social class and power dynamics play a role in both the murder and the investigation?
- What role does the setting of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania play in the narrative? How does it play in to the book's discussion of class?
- The novel deals with themes of gender inequality. How is this commentary woven into the investigation? How does it impact the resolution?
- How does Lydia's medical background enrich the novel?
- In the final pages Mr. Kohler suggests that maybe "It is time for a respite from poetry." to which Lydia says "No, Mr. Kohler...never" (p. 286). What do you think is next for Lydia?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY PUBLISHER

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## Author Biography



Ritu Mukerji was born in Kolkata, India, and raised in the San Francisco Bay area. From a young age, she has been an avid reader of mysteries, from Golden Age crime fiction to police procedurals and the novels of PD James and Ruth Rendell. She received a BA in history from Columbia University and a medical degree from Sidney Kimmel Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. She completed residency training at the University of California, Davis and has been a practicing internist for fifteen years. She lives in Marin County, California, with her husband and three children.