

Discussion Guide for An Unwelcome Distraction

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Discussion Facilitation Suggestions

Welcome

Welcome to this discussion guide for *An Unwelcome Distraction*, a delightful Regency-era romance blending muddy canal engineering, aristocratic sparks, and heartfelt discoveries! Whether you're a book club or history buffs, romance lover, or folk who enjoy stories of personal growth and unexpected love, this guide is designed to spark lively laughs, deep chats, and fun connections over the book's charming mix of grit, wit, and wonder. This guide is designed to spark fun, meaningful conversations—whether you're sipping coffee/tea/water and debating character choices or sharing how the story touches your own life.

Facilitation Possibilities

- Starting point: Consider the whole-book discussion questions, or delve into the Section by Section guide to follow the chapters' natural flow.
- Start with icebreakers like: "Who do you most relate to so far?" to get everyone talking.
- Time it right: Spend 5–7 minutes per section; use a timer for questions to keep energy high.
- Encourage everyone: Go around the circle for answers, and say "What do others think?" to build on responses.
- Handle hot topics: Faith, class, and romance can stir feelings—listen respectfully and tie back to the text.
- Add fun: Do the optional activities if your group loves them; they're quick and memorable.
- Wrap positively: Note one key takeaway per person.

Whole-Book Discussion Questions

1. Strongest character arc—who transforms most convincingly, and how?
2. Humour—what (dialogue, events) did you find amusing?
3. Romance tropes (enemies to friends, slow-burn, other)—fresh twists or familiar fun?
4. Pacing: Does the book builds suspense well?
5. Character interplay—which friendship/rivalry steals scenes?
6. World-building (Regency town/region, canals engineering, social environment)—What did you enjoy, and what works well?
7. Did you learn anything new about Regency times?
8. Plot surprises—most effective shock?
9. Dialogue sparkles—favourite witty exchange?
10. Deeper themes emerging from the story—what struck you?
11. Emotional pull—laughed, gasped, or swooned most?
12. Literary craft: How well was the book written? Is the writing style distinctive and how? Use of subplots. Recurring imagery that works? Predictability level?
13. Casting dream: Who might play Frances/McBride or other key characters?
14. What quirky minor character appealed to you and why?
15. How apt was the book title?
16. Memorable scene—why will it stick?
17. How satisfying was the ending of the book?
18. Storytelling success—riveting page-turner?

Section Discussions

Chapters 1–2: Muddy Introductions and Hidden Pasts

Lady Frances arrives in the Becksleigh region with her aristocratic family, clashes with canal engineer Alexander McBride amid a hilarious mud plunge, and uncovers his grudge against her father—setting up sparks of conflict and curiosity.

1. How does the author use the mud scene to introduce McBride's world and hook readers right away—effective comedy or over-the-top?
2. Frances's snobbery vs. McBride's rough exterior—what makes their first clash so memorable as character setup?

3. McBride's backstory with his grandfather—does it deepen him quickly, or feel like classic romance trope?
4. Alice's defence of McBride builds tension between cousins—smart dialogue for revealing class divides?
5. What emotional pull does McBride's vulnerability with Alice create for future development?

Optional Activity: "Mud Makeover Challenge"—Each person describes a possible "muddy mishap" victim and votes on the funniest.

Chapters 3–4: Tensions Rise at Work and with Frances

McBride faces Pearce's push to "grow up" and become a principal engineer, sabotage threatens the canal, and Frances encounters McBride again—while Carey emerges as a charming potential foil.

1. Pearce/McBride confrontation—strong character conflict or predictable mentor arc?
2. McBride's clay solution—clever plot device that showcases his smarts effectively?
3. Roadside banter with Frances—does the witty dialogue build romantic tension well?

Optional Activity: "Clay plotting"—List various ways one might use clay as a plot device?

Chapters 5–6: Social Sparks and Swings in the Garden

Evening parties reveal musical magic between Frances and McBride, Alice rejects his vague marital hopes, and Carey charms while sabotage talk escalates—heightening romantic and business tensions.

1. Music room duet—peak scene for chemistry; how well does the prose capture the magic?
2. Alice's rejection—believable character choice that heightens McBride's arc?
3. Frances's garden apology—subtle growth moment that pays off earlier prickliness?
4. Acksmore dismisses McBride's tunnel advice—how does this develop the plot?
5. Copes as early villain—vivid enough to make you hate him instantly?

Optional Activity: "Dream Duet"—Hum or describe a song that captures Frances/McBride's chemistry; group guesses the emotion!

Chapters 7–10: Frances and McBride coldness thaws, Clash with Lord Acksmore, Assault on McBride

McBride and Frances bond over music and thaw in conversation. The villainous spectre of Copes and Carey looms. Lord Acksmore warns McBride to stay away from his daughter and their past history is revealed, including McBride's role in saving Frances's life. McBride forced to leave the Leylands' house. He is later attacked by thugs.

1. Mill backstory flashback—does it enrich history without derailing momentum?
2. Garden thaw between leads—effective slow-burn romance building?
3. Churchyard quips—dialogue sparkle that reveals personalities perfectly?
4. If Copes is the villain, is Carey the mastermind?
5. Marsh attack climax—high-stakes action that grips?
6. Heroines' rescue—empowering twist on damsel trope?

Optional Activity: "Hero Reel"—Act out (safely!) Frances's crop swing or McBride's escape in 30 seconds; award "best save" props.

Chapters 11–13: Healing Wounds and Roman Secrets

McBride recovers at the Leylands amid restrictions on contact with Frances, but Mr Leyland allows a chaperoned visit to Roman ruins discovered during canal construction. Their outing leads to kisses—but a muddy fall forces a return home in a narrowboat. McBride is told to leave by Mr Leyland and stay away from Frances.

1. Chaperonage restrictions—smart tension-builder for forbidden romance?
2. Frances's trauma nightmares—nuanced emotional layering?
3. Ballard's subplot—effective foil for McBride's growth?
4. Ruins exploration—vivid setting that advances plot and passion?
5. Kiss payoff—earned emotional peak or rushed?
6. Boat escape on canal—how does this enhance the story?

Optional Activity: "Lucky Charm Share"—Pass around a coin/object; tell how it "saved" you like McBride's denarius.

Chapters 14: Denouement

McBride and Pearce leave the district for the funeral of their principal engineer. McBride returns with a solution to their problems.

1. Wealth twist—satisfying reveal? Did you predict this?
2. *Denarii* symbolism—subtle motif tying romance?
3. Acksmore flip to accept McBride—change believable?
4. Humorous ending and last line - how well does this work?

Optional Activity: "Muddiest Moment Montage"—Rank top sloppy scenes; funniest "what if" rewrite.

Closing

Share one scene that nailed character or plot for you.

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