



*Book Club Guide*



# From the Author

Dear Book Lover,

Can I come hang out with you and talk about books?

As an author and a reader, there are few things I love more than spending time with readers who enjoy a good story as much as I do. If your book club decides to read *These Tangled Threads*, I would LOVE to Zoom in (or come in person if you're not too far from Lenoir, NC) and talk about Lorna, Gentry, and Arthur like they're real people. Because, to me, they are!

When my editor suggested I write a book about Biltmore Estate—a grand château nestled in in the mountains of NC—I laughed and asked him if he'd read my books. How would I work a veritable castle into my stories about the everyday people of Appalachia?

But wait. Having worked in the PR department at the estate for six years, I'd picked up a few things. Like the fact that George and Edith Vanderbilt championed Biltmore Estate Industries, a program to train youth in traditional mountain skills like woodcarving and weaving. I had my in. I wrote a story about a master weaver who makes a desperate decision that haunts her for nearly a decade. The backdrop of that story just happens to be America's largest privately owned home.



I write stories about Appalachia. I love how the Vanderbilts, while bringing their Gilded Age influence to the mountains, were in turn influenced by the people of the surrounding area. My story ends with Cornelia Vanderbilt's 1924 wedding held 100 years ago this April. Not in New York City or Washington, D.C., or some other Gilded Age locale, but right here in Appalachia. Now that's worth talking about.

Let's keep the conversation going!

Best,

*Sarah*

Sarah Loudin Thomas

[SarahLoudinThomas.com](http://SarahLoudinThomas.com)



# Discussion Questions



1. Lorna, Gentry, and Arthur all experience childhood trauma through the death of parents, abandonment, and/or neglect. How do you think that impacted their decisions in life? How do each of them process that trauma differently?
2. Lorna “borrows” weaving patterns to save her career as well as to benefit Biltmore Industries. Are there ever situations when shading the truth is okay?
3. Gentry found comfort in playing her dulcimer and eventually used her gift for music to comfort others. What gifts do you have that offer you an escape and/or the opportunity to help others?
4. Arthur dropped everything when he learned he had a brother who needed him. Who would you drop everything to help?
5. George Vanderbilt chose an out-of-the-way spot for his Gilded Age château. How do you think locals would have reacted to seeing a castle being built in the Blue Ridge Mountains? How would you react today if someone like Bill Gates built a massive home in your neighborhood?
6. The book ends with Cornelia Vanderbilt’s wedding. Unfortunately, her marriage didn’t last. After having two sons, she moved to England and never returned to Biltmore Estate. Do you think being wealthy and well-known makes life easier or harder? Why?



# Weaving Without a Loom

Lorna and Gentry used a full-size loom to weave their creations. But you can weave a simple bit of fabric at home with just a few items you likely have readily at hand. My lovely niece helped me make a coaster for a mug of tea using her school's orange color. Next time we'll use different colors for the warp and woof.



# Weaving Without a Loom

## TOOLS

- Scissors
- Tape
- Ball of yarn
- Square of cardboard

## INSTRUCTIONS (images follow for reference)

1. Cut a square of cardboard. Make it larger than you want your final project to be.
2. Make your loom. Cut quarter-inch-deep slits along opposite sides of the cardboard. Cut at least 8–10 slits for a small item and more for larger items. The cuts should be about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart.
3. Set your warp. Place one end of your yarn in the bottom left slit and extend it to the *upper* left slit. Bring the yarn back through the second upper left slit (don't wrap it around and around the cardboard). Keep working back and forth until you have 8–10 warp threads on the front of your loom. The back should be mostly bare. Tape the cut ends of yarn to the back of the loom.
4. Start weaving. Cut a long piece of yarn for your woof (also called weft) thread. Tape one end to the back of your loom. Start weaving your thread over and under the warp threads, working back and forth until you've filled the loom. Make sure if you went *over* a thread in the first pass, you go *under* it in the second, and so on. Use your fingers to snug each pass against the previous one.
5. When you've filled your loom or have your fabric as large as you want, carefully remove it from the loom and cut each end loop. Tie the end pieces together to keep your masterpiece from unraveling.



Setup (steps 1 & 2)



Weaving back (step 3)



Weaving start (step 4)



Weaving in progress (step 4)



Off the loom (step 5)



Weaving completed!



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