
8. We see Mae involved with three very different men throughout the novel: Mercer, Francis, and Kalden. While they are on the surface wildly different, what might you say are traits they share that reveal what Mae is looking for in a relationship—and how do they satisfy these needs in their own ways? Does Mae ever seem truly happy?

9. Does the Circle seem concerned with promoting and preserving traditional family life? In what ways does it threaten to replace biological families with a wider human family, including via transparency?

10. Why do you think Ty felt the need to disguise himself in order to reach out to Mae as he did? How necessary was it for him to preserve his role as one of the Three Wise Men, even as he sought to dismantle the institution he helped create?

11. Is Annie in any sense a martyr of the Circle's mission? Did you ever feel as if you understood the motives behind her intense devotion to her job?

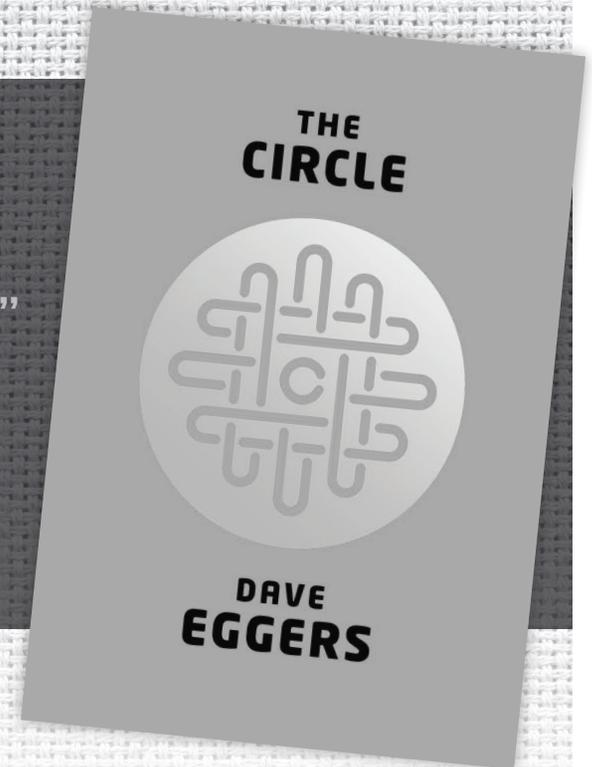
12. What is the impact of having Mercer's suicide seen by Mae through cameras—that is, indirectly? Do you think she genuinely believed she was trying to be his friend by launching the drones after him?

13. Many of the technologies the author invents in *The Circle* seem futuristic, but they are not so far from realities that exist now: myriad social media sites are obviously omnipresent, but the government is also developing facial recognition to screen for terrorists (*The New York Times*, August 20, 2013) and Google Glass seems not so unlike the camera necklace that allows for Mae's transparency. After finishing the novel, did you find this overlap between fact and fiction unsettling? Did it affect how you personally engage with technology?

Discussion Questions

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Dave Eggers is an American writer, editor, and publisher. He is known for the best-selling memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* and for his more recent work as a novelist and screenwriter.

He is also the founder of McSweeney's, the co-founder of the literacy project 826 Valencia, and the founder of ScholarMatch, a program that matches donors with students needing funds for college tuition. His works have appeared in several magazines, most notably *The New Yorker*. His works have received a significant amount of critical acclaim.

Book Summary

When Mae Holland is hired to work for the Circle, the world's most powerful internet company, she feels she's been given the opportunity of a lifetime. The Circle, run out of a sprawling California campus, links users' personal emails, social media, banking, and purchasing with their universal operating system, resulting in one online identity and a new age of civility and transparency.

As Mae tours the open-plan office spaces, the towering glass dining facilities, the cozy dorms for those who spend nights at work, she is thrilled with the company's modernity and activity. There are parties that last through the night, famous musicians playing on the lawn, athletic activities and clubs and brunches, and even an aquarium of rare fish retrieved from the Marianas Trench by the CEO.

Mae can't believe her luck, her great fortune to work for the most influential company in the world—even as life beyond the campus grows distant, even as a strange encounter with a colleague leaves her shaken, even as her role at the Circle becomes increasingly public.

What begins as the captivating story of one woman's ambition and idealism soon becomes a heart-racing novel of suspense, raising questions about memory, history, privacy, democracy, and the limits of human knowledge. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

1. How does Mae's behavior during her first days at work foreshadow what happens to her over the course of the novel? In what ways is she an "ideal" employee of the Circle and its aims?
 2. The wings of the Circle are named after different regions of the world and time periods, such as Old West, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Machine Age, the Industrial Revolution. What do these names say about the company's vision of historical innovation versus its future-looking work? Is there an inherent hierarchy in these names, despite their apparent equality?
 3. In what ways does Annie inspire and motivate Mae in terms of the level of success that can be achieved at the Circle? Does Mae consider Annie's position the product of Annie's own ambition, or something she imbibed from the company's ethos? How does knowing first about their professional relationship shape your understanding of their shared past?
 4. For a company that thrives on order and efficiency, the Circle also seems to endorse—require, even—loose and extravagant socializing. What do these two seemingly opposite values say about what working for them entails? How does Mae's value set evolve to accommodate these expectations?
 5. Mae's first serious blunder on the job is failing to respond to and attend a social event, Alistair's Portugal brunch. How does the meeting in Dan's office set the tone for Mae's pushing the Circle's networks on others?
 6. Among the Three Wise Men—Ty, Bailey, and Stenton—who has a vision of what the Circle can—and should—do that seems most viable? In the end, is this trifecta of power able to prevent tyranny? What might the novel's conclusion say about man's reaction to power—even when humanity is apparently subsumed under technology?
 7. It is both a curse and a blessing that Mae is able to provide her parents with health care: while her father is able to receive the MS treatment he desperately needs, Mae seems to benefit even more from her ability to share his story online through support groups and ultimately drives those groups away. Did you ever feel that her actions became more selfish than selfless, and if so, when?
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