

A SOCIAL IMPACT NOVEL

# Beneath the Seams



When success comes at a cost,  
who pays the price?



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## BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. As the story begins, what are some of the hurdles Shelby has already overcome to start her mother-daughter dress company? What are some of the obstacles she faces in scaling her business so quickly?
2. Maye is older than Shelby, but not old enough to be her mother. What are some of the benefits of a friendship with someone in a different age group or season of life? How does Shelby's relationship with Maye differ from her relationship with her coffee group friends?
3. What are some of the ways the materialism in Shelby's life sparks conflict in her relationships?
4. At the start of the story, Shelby and Bryan's marriage is not as strong as it used to be. What are some factors of young parenthood that can strain a relationship? What are some things young parents can do to alleviate this tension?
5. Much of Shelby's journey unfolds during the minutia of motherhood. Washing dishes, sorting laundry, making dinner, school drop-offs, running errands. How does the ever-present reality of housework and family routines shape a woman's story and a family's culture?
6. How are nonprofit organizations helpful to workers like Nipa and families like Ravi's (in India)? What limitations do nonprofits like the fictional Caring Hope Organization face in fulfilling its mission to help community members?
7. How does receiving gifts play a role in the story? Under what conditions do gifts demonstrate love? Under what circumstances are they just extra items? What are some other ways to show love?
8. Many aspects of the story expose the polarizing conflict between what's visible on the surface and what lies beneath it. How do social media, photography, religious services, and even book publishing fit this description? In what other aspects of the story or your life have you witnessed this duality of seen and unseen? How does what's seen impact what isn't seen?
9. After Shelby learns about Runa's connection to the fire, why does she wait so long to tell Bryan, Maye, and her friends what happened? How does her fear of the truth mirror some aspects of the fashion industry?



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10. Shelby struggles with guilt related to her company's role in the fire. Throughout the story, different characters place fault on different players in the supply chain. To what extent does the blame rest on Treasured Pockets, Surface Trend Market, the export agency, the outsourcing factory, and/or the production factory. To what extent does it rest on consumers?
11. During the story, Shelby has to make several crucial decisions. What are some of these decisions, and what criteria does she use to make them? Do you agree with the decisions she made? What do you think she should have done differently, and why? How do you make pivotal decisions in your life?
12. Shelby's grandmother Dear never makes an appearance in the story, yet she remains an important source of wisdom. Dear's life mantra is taken from Proverbs 3:27: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to act." Is there a special person in your life, alive or passed on, whose wisdom you rely on, or inspires you to live a certain way?
13. Every piece of clothing travels a long way from field to closet. On a map, trace the journey of a T-shirt whose cotton is grown in India, dyed and sewn in Cambodia, shipped to the U.S. West Coast and distributed to a mall near you. How many different entities make up the shirt's supply chain? What do you think is a fair price for all the labor and shipping costs involved in this process? How does this price compare to the price consumers want to pay?
14. Conscious fashion advocacy organizations make it clear that fast fashion, in which clothing trends are replicated and produced quickly and sold cheaply at high volume, is harmful to the environment and to workers in the supply chain. How does slowing down the production process improve conditions for workers and the earth?
15. It is estimated that in the United States only 10% of clothing that is donated is resold. The rest ends up in the landfill, where synthetic clothing can take up to 200 years to decompose. What changes could be made by retailers and consumers to keep clothing from being disposable?
16. Do you believe we can shop our way to a more ethical, sustainable fashion industry? Or is more direct intervention needed from governments and regulatory agencies? What are some small changes consumers can make to their shopping habits that can yield real changes for garment workers?



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17. Tragedies like Tazreen and Rana Plaza amass a lot of media attention. What struggles do minimum-wage-earning garment workers face every day? Even though these tragedies both happened in the same country, why is it not advised to boycott clothing based on where it's produced?
18. In recent years, research has called into question the benefit of humanitarian tourism like the short-term mission trips Maye and Roger took to Dhaka. Do you think overseas service trips by well-meaning groups to impoverished communities are helpful or harmful? What factors ensure humanitarian tourism is beneficial to the people being served?
19. There's no perfect clothing company, but many brands strive toward an ethical, sustainable, and transparent supply chain. Which brands are making a clear effort to do more good? Which brands need to be called out for harmful practices or greed? How can consumers pressure retailers to pass along more pay and resources to garment workers?

**Thanks for reading *Beneath the Seams*.**

For more ideas of activities to  
raise garment workers' voices, visit:

<http://www.peyton-roberts.com/book-clubs>