

POOLE^{OF} LIGHT

A GOLDEN AGE. A SHADOWED PAST.



Dear Readers,

Thank you so much for choosing ***Poole of Light*** for your book club. The novel grew from a fascination with the golden age of cinema and how picture houses shaped everyday life in twentieth-century Britain. Jem's journey is about ambition, resilience and the light we chase through darkness – on and off the screen.

I hope the story sparks thoughtful conversation in your group, and that you enjoy stepping into those velvet-seated, neon-lit picture palaces.

With gratitude,
RJ Verity

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

TIP: Choose a few questions in advance to keep your meeting flowing.

1. Jem's first glimpse of a moving picture transforms his life. Do you think he is chasing cinema itself, or something deeper?
2. How do WWI and WWII shape Jem as a man, a father and a dreamer?
3. Class and ambition drive much of Jem's journey. How does the novel show both the opportunities and costs of rising above one's origins?
4. Daisy, Cara and Winnie represent very different connections for Jem. What do they each symbolize in his life?
5. Which relationship in the novel felt most authentic to you — Jem's with William, Clive, Cara, Daisy, Winnie or Harry?
6. How does Jem's obsession with projection — with light — mirror the way we sometimes project myths about ourselves?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. The cinema offers both escape and community. Do you think Jem uses it more as an escape, or as a way of belonging?
8. How did you respond to Jem's flaws? Did you sympathize with him, or find him frustrating at times?
9. Which era in the book resonated most with you – the coal-stained hardship of the 1910s, the glamour of the 1930s picture palaces, the shadows of wartime or some other time?
10. If Poole of Light were adapted for screen, which scenes would you most want to see brought to life?
11. The book suggests that legacy lies not in wealth or reputation, but in memory and connection. Do you agree?
12. How did the ending shape your understanding of Jem's journey – growth, redemption or something more complicated?

THE GOLDEN AGE OF CINEMA

1900s
to
1910s

Travelling shows gave way to permanent picture houses. By 1913, cinemas were spreading across industrial Britain.

WWI

Films provided both escape and propaganda. Newsreels gave audiences regular glimpses of the war front.

1920s
to
1930s

Talkies revolutionised film. Odeon and others modernised the moviegoing experience. By the mid-1930s, Leeds alone had 60–70 cinemas operating at the same time.

WWII

Despite bombings and blackouts, cinemas stayed open, offering warmth, community, and morale.

DISCUSSION PROMPT

- If your own city had that many cinemas, how might it shape daily life, social class, or ambition?
- Do you think cinema today plays the same role in community life, or has that “flicker of light” been replaced by something else?

LEEDS AT THE MOVIES

By the mid-1930s, Leeds was home to between 60 and 70 cinemas operating at once — one of the highest concentrations anywhere in Britain. From tiny backstreet halls to glittering art-deco palaces, the city flickered with stories on every corner.

Many cinemas have gone or been repurposed, but projects like **Lost Cinemas of Leeds** (lostcinemas.co.uk) preserve their memory through maps, photographs, and stories.



The Paramount (later Odeon) on The Headrow (opened 1932): a 2,500-seat modernist palace, opened with huge fanfare and queues around the block.

Cottage Road Cinema (opened 1912): a neighbourhood picture house that has survived against all odds — and is still showing films today.



These picture palaces weren't just buildings — they were promises of light, glamour and escape.



You can find out more about cinemas, usherettes, the golden age of cinema and the real people behind my stories on my blog: rjverity.com/extras

FUN EXTRAS – DRINKS, SNACKS & MUSIC

Something to accompany your book club discussion?

GOLDEN LIGHT COCKTAIL / MOCKTAIL

- **Cocktail:** 1.5 oz gin (or vodka), 1 oz elderflower liqueur, top with sparkling lemonade or prosecco. Garnish with lemon twist and gold sugar rim.
- **Mocktail:** 1 oz elderflower cordial, top with sparkling lemonade or ginger ale. Garnish the same way.



*Serve in coupe glasses
for a 1930s vibe*

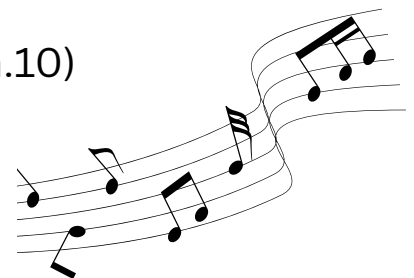
SNACKS



- **Buttered popcorn**
- **Toffee apples**
- **Fruit pastilles or wine gums**
- **Tea cakes or scones** (for a British touch)

MUSIC

- **Tomorrow's Another Day** – Glenn Miller (Ch.10)
- **Stardust** – Benny Goodman (Ch.10)
- **You're the Top** – Cole Porter (Ch.16)
- **Sing, Sing, Sing** – Louis Prima (Ch.16)
- **"The Kid" Soundtrack** – Charlie Chaplin (Ch.22)
- **Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor** – Rachmaninoff (Ch.23)
- **When I'm Cleaning Windows** – George Formby (Ch.25)



AUTHOR Q&A

Q What inspired Poole of Light?

A The spark came from my father. As a teenager in 1950s Leeds, he worked as a projectionist in a modest local cinema full of warmth and wonder. Long before I'd heard of Odeon or Oscar Deutsch, it was his memories that lit something in me — a fascination with how cinema didn't just entertain but shaped people's dreams. That's where Jem Poole's story began: in a booth, with a boy, and a flicker of light.

Q Which character was the hardest to write?

A Jem, without question. He's flawed — driven, often blinkered, and sometimes painfully human. I didn't want to soften those edges, but I also didn't want readers to lose empathy for him. Striking that balance — letting him grow without excusing him — was probably the hardest part of the novel.

Q How much research went into recreating cinema in the 1930s?

A Research became one of my favourite parts of writing. I drew from archives, interviews, and British Film Institute materials. I explored the history of old cinemas — many now lost — and tried to imagine how they felt from the inside. I also researched the rise of Odeon and how cinema evolved during wartime. The challenge wasn't just getting the facts right, but capturing the emotional atmosphere of those picture palaces.

Q Why choose cinema instead of a more traditional war setting?

A Cinema played an important part in the war effort — offering comfort, community, and a powerful narrative about what people were fighting for. But more than that, it allowed me to explore deeper questions about memory, reinvention, and how we construct meaning. It's the light Jem chases — not the battles he fights — that defines him.

Q What can readers expect in The Poole Legacy trilogy?

A Each book explores a different generation of the Poole family, confronting the changing nature of ambition and identity. You'll meet new voices, travel to new settings, and see how one family's legacy reverberates through time — not always neatly, but always with echoes of the light that started it all. 7

PRINTABLE BOOKMARK

*A flicker of light – and
nothing was ever the same*



POOLE OF LIGHT RJ VERITY

1. *PRINT ON THICK PAPER*
2. *CUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINES*
3. *GLUE BOTH SIDES TOGETHER*