

Paper Ghosts

by Sarah Addison Allen



About the Book

Part ghost story, part love story and steeped in magical realism, PAPER GHOSTS will transport you to a place where old secrets echo through the years and love finds a way of bringing us home.

Every family has its secrets. The Wester women live inside theirs.

For decades, the women of Wester House have unsettled and fascinated their small, timeless North Carolina town. Their home is full of whispers, old griefs and uncanny knowing. But when Willamena Wester reaches out to the granddaughter she once pushed away, long-buried truths begin to stir.

1976: Restless young Willamena falls for a stranded musician who brings freedom and the promise of another life to her carefully controlled world. Their brief, incandescent love story promises to escape the pull of the Wester legacy until Willamena makes a fateful choice that changes her life forever.

Present day: Returning home is the last thing Bailey Wester wants. Yet, as she reconnects with Willamena, the grandmother she feared, Bailey begins to understand the love, heartbreak and impossible choices that shaped the women in her family and realizes the past may not have been trying to haunt them after all.

A luminous novel filled with Sarah Addison Allen's stunning prose and signature blend of romance, Southern charm and wonder, PAPER GHOSTS reminds us that in order to have the future we really want, sometimes we need to live with the past and not let go of it.

Discussion Guide

1. Both Willamena and Bailey are shaped by stories they didn't fully live through themselves. How does the novel

suggest memory can be inherited, and how does that inheritance affect the choices the characters make? Have you ever felt defined by a past that wasn't entirely your own?

2. Each generation of Wester women is branded the "Witch of Wester House." How does this reputation affect their status in Hen Town, and to what extent do you think they contribute to or encourage that perception? Have you ever had to lean into a certain perception to keep a more important part of yourself hidden?

3. Hiding her ability to see ghosts from Bailey is the method Willamena uses to "save" her granddaughter from the family curse. Do you believe this protection is rooted in love, fear or a desire for control? Have you ever experienced a situation where care and control blurred together?

4. Bailey is drawn to the idea of a "dangerous" boy, partly influenced by her romanticized view of her grandmother's secret past. When the reality of Bailey's interaction with Clutch fails to mirror the legend of Jack, how does the confrontation force Willamena to realize that her silence and secrets did more to obscure the truth than to protect her granddaughter from it?

5. PAPER GHOSTS is steeped in magical realism --- from seeing ghosts and Tasha's emotions manifesting as scents, to time slowing down in Hen Town. How do these elements function as metaphors for the characters' internal experiences? Which of these magical elements felt most "real" to you in your own life?

6. The title references the quote: "Photographs are paper ghosts. They're the only ghosts everyone can see." How does this shift your perspective on literal ghosts versus the emotional memories held in physical objects? What object in your own life acts as a "paper ghost" for you? Both Willamena and Bailey are shaped by stories they didn't fully live through themselves. How does the novel suggest memory can be inherited, and how does that inheritance affect the choices the characters make? Have you ever felt defined by a past that wasn't entirely your own?

7. The book is divided into three parts: "Rewind," "Fast Forward" and "Play." How do these musical terms mirror the stages of Willamena's life? Why is it significant that Bailey is the one who finally gets to press "Play"?

8. Bailey's and Tasha's families have a history of conflict dating back to 1976. How does their eventual decision to forge a friendship represent a true breaking of the generational curse? Can you think of a time when a personal connection helped you overcome a long-standing prejudice or grievance?

9. At the end of the novel, Willamena requests that the Wester House be torn down. Why was it necessary to destroy the physical structure? When have you had to "destroy" or let go of a physical space or a period of your life in order to truly move forward?

10. Throughout the novel, characters must choose between stability (tied to history) and the uncertainty of freedom. Which character's journey feels most resonant to you, and what would you choose if you were in their position? Do you think the rewards of breaking free are always worth the cost?

Author Bio

Sarah Addison Allen is the *New York Times* bestselling author of GARDEN SPELLS, THE SUGAR QUEEN, THE GIRL WHO CHASED THE MOON, THE PEACH KEEPER, LOST LAKE, FIRST FROST, OTHER BIRDS and PAPER GHOSTS. She was born and raised in Asheville, North Carolina.

Paper Ghosts

by Sarah Addison Allen

Publication Date: September 1, 2026

Genres: Fiction, Magical Realism, Women's Fiction

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: St. Martin's Press

ISBN-10: 1250283426

ISBN-13: 9781250283429