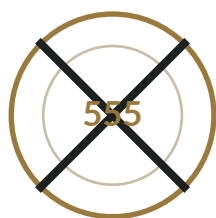


THE HOLLOW BADGE

Official Book Club Guide



A spoiler-friendly companion for readers returning to St. Aubin

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Welcome to St. Aubin

Some towns preserve their history in museums. St. Aubin preserves its history in stories, buildings, photographs, traditions - and sometimes in places no one thinks to look.

The Hollow Badge begins with a box hidden for decades and a simple instruction:

“If found, deliver unopened to an honest officer.”

Inside is a damaged police badge, an old evidence tag, and a mystery someone believed was important enough to preserve for the future.

What follows is not simply an investigation into what happened. It is an investigation into what people choose to remember, what they choose to forget, and what can happen when protecting an institution becomes more important than protecting the truth.

Thank you for choosing The Hollow Badge for your book club. Pour something cold, get comfortable, and welcome to St. Aubin.

— **Christopher Galvez**

A Note for the Host

This guide contains major spoilers. Save the discussion section until everyone has finished the novel. For a 60-90 minute meeting, choose 8-12 questions rather than trying to cover all of them. The best discussions will probably come from the questions on evidence, loyalty, Chief LeBlanc's decision, Mayor Voss, and Badge 555.

Before the Discussion

Think back over the novel through these eight ideas:

TRUTH	EVIDENCE	LOYALTY	HISTORY
REPUTATION	COMMUNITY	DUTY	SILENCE

At different points, the characters must decide which of those matters most. Their answers are not always the same.

Quick opener

Go around the room and answer in one sentence: What did you think this book was about when you began it, and what did you think it was about when you finished?

Then begin the deeper discussion.

Discussion Questions

1. Why Merrick?

The hidden box is meant for “an honest officer.” After meeting Merrick Jameson in the opening pages, what makes him the kind of person Chief LeBlanc hoped would eventually find it? Is honesty enough, or does discovering truth also require curiosity, patience, and a willingness to question accepted history?

2. “Evidence never lied. People did.”

Merrick believes strongly in the objectivity of evidence. After finishing the novel, do you agree? Can evidence effectively “lie” when people hide it, destroy it, remove it from context, or refuse to look at it?

3. Elijah and St. Aubin

Elijah does not merely police St. Aubin. He loves it. How does that make his investigation harder? Would exposing the truth have been easier if he cared less about the town and its people?

4. When does loyalty become complicity?

Several people convince themselves that silence protects something valuable: a family, a reputation, a department, a community, or another person. Where is the line crossed? Is remaining silent morally different from actively participating in a lie?

5. Why do the ordinary moments matter?

Coffee, meals, familiar faces, roosters, small complaints, and routine police work occupy a surprising amount of Elijah’s world. How did those scenes affect your reaction when that world began to unravel? Would the mystery have worked the same way if St. Aubin had seemed corrupt from page one?

6. What makes an “honest officer”?

Does honesty simply mean refusing to lie? Or does it sometimes require challenging other officers, superiors, institutions, and accepted history?

7. Suspicion versus proof

Chief LeBlanc repeatedly pushes Elijah to distinguish what he suspects from what he can prove. Were there points when you, as a reader, became convinced before Elijah had enough evidence to justify the same conclusion?

Discussion Questions — continued

8. Facts versus assumptions

The investigation repeatedly forces the characters to separate what they know from what they think they know. Which assumption of yours changed most dramatically as the story unfolded?

9. “Who benefits?”

How does asking who benefits change the investigation? By the end, are some characters protecting advantages and reputations they inherited rather than wrongs they personally committed?

10. Item 27

At first, Item 27 is simply a mystery. By the end, what does it represent to you: proof, memory, institutional failure, responsibility, or something else?

11. Silas Landry

Silas is dead long before the novel begins, yet he becomes central to it. At what point did he stop feeling like a historical mystery and begin feeling like a person who had been wronged?

12. Does truth expire?

Decades have passed and many of the original participants are dead. Does exposing the truth still matter when punishment may no longer be possible? If so, who is the truth for?

13. Curtis: shield or villain?

LeBlanc eventually realizes Curtis is “the shield,” not the architect. Without excusing his conduct, what do you think Curtis believes he is protecting? How does his idea of loyalty differ from Elijah’s?

14. “They’re protecting the story.”

After Judge Fontenot is killed, LeBlanc realizes the conspiracy is no longer merely protecting evidence; it is protecting the accepted story. Why can controlling a community’s story become as important as controlling physical evidence?

Discussion Questions — continued

15. Mayor Voss and inheritance

Voss asks Elijah which inheritance he would choose: the good accomplished by the people who built St. Aubin, or the truth about the terrible things some of those same people did. Can both histories coexist without one erasing the other?

16. “You can’t preserve honor by protecting dishonor.”

Voss finally reaches that conclusion and prepares to confess. Does a late decision to tell the truth have moral value after years of helping preserve a lie? What, if anything, does it redeem?

17. The empty revolver

Before meeting Voss beneath Founders’ Oak, Elijah deliberately unloads his service revolver so no one can later call his death a shootout. What does that decision reveal about him?

18. Badge 555

The bullet passes through Elijah’s badge before entering his chest. The badge does not save him. What does the damaged badge represent when LeBlanc later places it in the box? How does it change the meaning of the title?

19. LeBlanc’s promise

Elijah asks LeBlanc to protect the evidence rather than his career, and LeBlanc promises not to let the truth be buried again. He later hides the archive where it may wait decades. Are those actions contradictory, or is concealment sometimes a form of preservation?

20. Trusting the future

Was LeBlanc right to trust a future “honest officer” rather than the institutions of his own time? What does his choice suggest about faith in individuals versus faith in institutions?

The Question With No Easy Answer

Imagine you discover indisputable evidence that an institution you have loved, served, and believed in was built partly upon a terrible injustice.

Exposing the truth will hurt innocent people who had nothing to do with what happened. Hiding it will protect them.

What do you owe more: the living, the dead, the institution, or the truth?

There is no official answer. That is the point.

Three Character Conversations

Elijah Booker: Choose one word that best describes Elijah, then defend it. After everyone answers: Did Elijah die because of the badge, or because he understood what the badge was supposed to mean?

Chief LeBlanc: He spends much of the novel teaching Elijah to separate evidence from assumption. By the end, LeBlanc himself must make an enormous decision about evidence. Make the strongest case both for and against what he did.

St. Aubin: Treat the town as a person. What are its best qualities? Its worst? What does it fear? What does it value? What does it refuse to admit about itself? By the final page, has St. Aubin changed - or has only the reader's understanding changed?

Two Book Club Exercises

The Badge Question

Before discussing it, have everyone privately complete this sentence:

“A badge should mean _____.”

Then compare the answers with Badge 555. Early in the novel, the badge represents authority. By the end, Elijah says its meaning has become responsibility. What changed?

The Evidence Exercise

Choose one mystery or suspect from the novel and make two columns on a sheet of paper:

FACTS	ASSUMPTIONS

When did an assumption become a fact? Which assumption turned out to be wrong? This mirrors a central discipline of Elijah’s investigation: knowing the difference between what the evidence proves and what you merely believe happened.

Make It a Louisiana Night

St. Aubin is fictional. The Louisiana atmosphere around it is not. If your group wants to lean into the setting, keep it easy: the point is conversation, not catering an entire festival.

SAVORY	SWEET	DRINKS
Boudin Cracklins Mini muffulettas Red beans & rice Jambalaya	Bread pudding Pralines Beignets	Sweet tea Chicory coffee Louisiana beer Bourbon or whiskey Sazerac

Five-Minute Louisiana Warm-Up

1. Louisiana has counties. True or false?
2. What is Louisiana's state bird?
3. What is the state motto?
4. What term is commonly associated with descendants of Acadian settlers in Louisiana?
5. Is St. Aubin Parish real?

Answers: 1) False - parishes. 2) Brown pelican. 3) Union, Justice, Confidence. 4) Cajun. 5) No - St. Aubin is fictional.

Behind the Badge

A Conversation With the Author

Christopher Galvez is a Louisiana author whose fiction draws on crime, history, human behavior, and the culture of his home state. His law-enforcement background informs the professional texture of the Merrick Jameson series while St. Aubin, its characters, and the events of the novel remain fictional.

Questions to Save for Chris

- What part of St. Aubin feels most like the Louisiana you know?
- Which pieces of police culture were most important to get right?
- Why make evidence - something usually sitting quietly on a shelf - so central to the story?
- Which character changed the most between the first idea and the final manuscript?
- Did you know Elijah's ending when you began writing?
- What does Badge 555 mean to you as the author?
- Which scene would you most like to watch readers debate?
- What can you tell us about where the Merrick Jameson series goes next?

Host tip

Ask everyone to bring one question they would only ask after finishing the book. Spoiler-friendly author conversations are usually far more interesting than generic “where do you get your ideas?” interviews.

Invite the Author

Book clubs reading *The Hollow Badge* may request a virtual visit with Christopher Galvez, subject to scheduling and availability.

A visit can include:

- Behind-the-scenes discussion of *The Hollow Badge*
- Merrick Jameson, Elijah Booker, and the creation of St. Aubin
- Louisiana and law-enforcement influences
- Writing and publishing discussion
- A spoiler-friendly reader Q&A;

When requesting a visit, include your club's name, approximate number of members, location, preferred meeting date, and whether everyone will have finished the novel.

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Find The Hollow Badge

All eBook retailers

<https://books2read.com/u/b61xlJ>

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A Final Question Before Leaving St. Aubin

The novel ends where it began: with a box. One generation preserves the evidence. Another generation discovers it.

Was the hero of The Hollow Badge Elijah Booker, Merrick Jameson, Chief LeBlanc - or the evidence itself?

Thank you for reading. And thank you for spending an evening in St. Aubin.