

The Parting Discussion Questions

1. Suzy asked Nellie Mae to promise to destroy her diary if anything ever happened to her. Have you ever been tempted to make a promise to a loved one that you might not be able to keep?
2. The Fisher family's withered corn crop and the regional drought can be seen as metaphors linked to both Suzy's death and the growing dissent among the People of Honeybrook. Do you see either the crop failure or the drought as having any spiritual significance? If so, what?
3. When Reuben considers his shunned cousin Jonathan's newfound faith, he observes that What a man chose to think about such things independent of the membership is not trustworthy at all. In a time when so many people pride themselves on their individualism, what do you think about this notion of the relationship between community and personal beliefs or faith? What are some disadvantages of such a view of community? Are there any advantages?
4. Even so-called accidents were the will of the Sovereign One, Jehovah God-- What is your reaction to this statement? What do you think of the Amish response to death? In this book, how do you see the loss of Suzy affecting Nellie, Betsy, and Reuben? Do you think one has a healthier approach to grief than the others?
5. Reuben realizes that in blindly following the teachings of his ancestors, he's missed out on some vital truths. What are some ways that a modern "English" person can also be "kept from the truth due to tradition"?
6. At the end of chapter 7, Nellie Mae encounters Caleb after a Preaching. From Caleb's point of view, what about Nellie sets her apart from many Amish girls? Which of her personality traits do you find most appealing? Is there anything you don't like about her?
7. What do you think of Bishop Joseph's decision to depart Honeybrook at a time when so much controversy is brewing among his flock? Do you think events might have progressed differently had he remained at home?
8. At one point, Nellie considers that her words had the power to kill or build her friendship with Caleb. Words, whether spoken or written, have a tremendous amount of power in this story. Discuss particularly the role of Suzy's diary and Scripture and the effect each has on characters and events.
9. Why do you suspect Kate--and John--waited so long to tell others (including

Kate's own mother, Rachel) about their decision to give their babies to Rosanna and Elias? Can you imagine being in either Kate's or Rosanna's position?

10. Nellie Mae lies to Caleb about Suzy, telling him the rumors about her sister are false. What are some other things she does throughout the book to protect their relationship? Does Caleb act in similar ways? What do you think of these efforts?

11. The spiritual awakening that takes place among many Old Order Amish in this book and the resultant birth of the New Order Amish actually happened. Have you heard of or even experienced other spiritual awakenings? In what ways are they similar to or different from what's described here?

12. Nellie was the sole protector of Suzy's intimate reflections of her dreams. If you were in Nellie's place, would you be tempted to read Suzy's diary? Why or why not?

13. Reuben proclaims to his daughters that his and Betsy's newfound belief in salvation by grace "will change the direction of our lives." It is easy to predict what kinds of dramatic implications this spiritual transformation might have for an Amishman like Reuben. Do you think it is more difficult for modern Westerners to distinguish between the vital elements of faith and the cultural trappings of their everyday lives?

14. Suzy prays that she be willing to do whatever it takes for her family to come to salvation. Talk about the role of Suzy, her death, and her diary in her family's openness to the Gospel. Do you agree with Nellie that Suzy might have unknowingly offered up her own life for her family?

15. Both Nellie Mae and Caleb struggle with how to honor their parents without denying the strong romantic pull each feels toward the other. Have you or someone you know also faced such a dilemma? How was it resolved?

16. Nellie Mae is unable to dream of Suzy from the time of her sister's death until the end of the book. Why do you think this is so?