

The Shunning Discussion Questions

1. Katie considers that being Mam's favorite was both a blessing and a curse. Talk about the ways in which favoritism--whether displayed by a relative or teacher or someone else--can be helpful or harmful to children.
2. Katie has offered up her music and tendency toward fancy things on the altar of repentance time and again without success. Why do you think Katie hasn't been successful? Have you ever offered up a desire to God only to find yourself drawn toward it once again? If so, what did you do?
3. The Amish give their children two full years of total acceptance and adoration before they attempt to mold them into obedient Amish children. What do you think of this approach to child rearing--all indulgence, then strict discipline? How does it compare to how you were raised or how you would raise children?
4. Have you experienced a friendship as close as Katie's is with Mary, one where your friend seems to get inside your heart and know things almost before you did? What are the benefits of such a friendship?
5. For the Amish, barrenness is a "near curse." Contrast the Plain view of infertility with the view of modern society. Are there differences in the way each community sees children?
6. Katie's father, Samuel, threatens to report her disobedience to the bishop if she doesn't confess on her own. What do you think of Samuel's willingness to do this? How does this way of looking at the relationship between church and family compare to your own view?
7. Katie believes God has created her to make music, but such an artistic gift has no value in a community that discourages seemingly frivolous pursuits or calling attention to oneself. How well would you do living in a community that discourages artistic expression? Like Katie, would you chafe under the Ordnung?
8. Do you think it is possible for love to grow between two people in a marriage of convenience? Do you think success is more likely among the Amish? Why or why not?
9. Ella Mae Zook seemed to listen like she believed every last word you told her. Never handed out a bunch of shoulds and shouldn'ts neither. Just let a body settle for himself what he ought to do. In your opinion, does this describe a good listener? What are some other desirable characteristics in a confidante?

10. Jacob Beiler tells Katie that "Daed's s'posed to be rightâ€¦. God makes bishops that-a-way." What do you think of this statement? How does it line up with what you've been taught?
11. Rebecca is so shaken by Laura's letter that she casts it into the woodstove. If you were in Rebecca's place, how would you react? Would you honor Laura's request? What part do you think Rebecca's culture plays in her actions? her heart?
12. Katie refuses to destroy her guitar because she feels "another's sin" on some level justifies her own. Do you think she is right to feel this way? Have you ever found yourself making a similar rationalization?
13. In time, Katie suspects her parents of deceit. Have you ever suspected a parent or someone close to you was not being truthful regarding an important matter? What did you do?
14. Why do you think Samuel and Rebecca chose to keep Katie's true origins a secret from her? from the People? Would you have decided differently in their circumstances?
15. Discuss the significance of the satin baby dress to Rebecca--and to Katie.
16. Talk about the many preparations for an Amish wedding. In what ways are they similar to those for an English wedding? How are they unique?
17. Katie chooses not to pour her heart out to Mary out of respect for her mother's wish she keep her unorthodox adoption private. Do you think this was a wise choice? Why or why not?
18. Katie is "English by birth and Plain by adoption." What role do you believe nature and nurture play in a person's life? Can you understand Katie's leaving home in light of the new information she has about her identity?
19. "One who wastes time, wastes life itself." Do you agree or disagree with this Amish saying? Discuss.
20. Katie realizes that in trying to be good, she had become weak, though she blames her inability to live up to the Ordnung on not being born Amish. Do you think this is correct or might there be other more spiritual reasons?
21. Contrast Samuel's stern response to Katie's willful behavior to Rebecca's response. Can you understand the reasons behind each parent's reaction?

22. At the membership meeting where Katie is officially shunned, people offer two opposing views of how to handle her conduct: "Love the wayward one back to the fold" versus "Impose severe restrictions so she'll know what's comin' if she don't repent." Which approach would you generally expect to be more successful? What about in Katie's case?

23. Katie believes Bishop John is cruel for being so quick to slap the Bann on her. Do you agree? Do you think his personal feelings play a role in his treatment of her up to this point? in his treatment of her now?

24. "A body can't go around forever without communing with friends." Would you be able to endure the shunning as experienced by Katie? Would it cause you to confess, or to leave, knowing you might forever remain cut off from those you love?