

DISCUSSION NOTES:

LOVE IN THE PRESENT TENSE by Catherine Ryan Hyde

1) 'Speaking of dignity, it is dignity when you own what you did. Not pretend. So, I shot that man. Just like they think I did. I will say that now'

Pearl has killed a man, and yet our loyalties remain with her when she goes on the run. Why do you think this is? Do we make the same concessions for the cops who shot her?

2) When the gun goes off in Pearl's hand, how completely do you see this as an accident? Do you think the world in which Pearl lived played a role, and, if so, how much of a role?

3) Pearl protects Leonard like a lioness, shielding him from the dangerous world and the tragic story of his father. Do you think this helps or hinders the way in which Leonard later copes with her disappearance?

4) What is the real meaning (or meanings) of the title of the book?

5) Do you think Leonard's "forever love" is possible in a romantic involvement? Or do you feel that such a totally selfless love is reserved for parental situations or other more "pure" devotion?

6) Have you ever felt an ongoing emotional connection with a loved one after his or her death?

7) If you had been in Mitch's position, and didn't believe Leonard's assertion that Pearl was still "with him," would you want to help Leonard face the truth, or would you consider it kinder to allow him that delusion?

8) Because of the three separate character viewpoints, you knew what Mitch and Leonard initially didn't: Pearl's fate. If you had not seen this through her eyes, what would you have believed?

9) What do you think Leonard is looking for in his scrapes with death?

10) Leonard is in search of a last name and an identity through most of the book, but in Mitch's dream, Pearl says, "Leonard knows who he is." Do you agree with that statement?

11) If Leonard had been born with good health and perfect vision, to what extent do you feel his life would have been different and why?

12) Pearl becomes a kind of personal God to Leonard, and he routinely 'sees' her in a candle flame or a bird or a raindrop. Does this make Leonard extraordinary? In what ways is he just a normal boy?

13) Mitch and Leonard share an unusual relationship. How do they change each other over the years? How do you think Mitch's life would have turned out without Leonard in it?

14) Mitch's home environment was not ideally stable, but Leonard certainly didn't lack love in Mitch's care. Do you agree with Leonard's adoption into a two-parent home?

15) Who would you say is the true hero or heroine of the novel?

16) Would you have found it in yourself to hate Benny and Chet if you were in Leonard's shoes?

17) What do you think it satisfies in us to be able to "mark" the life and death of a loved one? What rituals for the dead do you believe in, and why do they feel important?