

***Words Unspoken* Discussion Questions**

The 'words unspoken' in the novel are the voices of the subconscious. Think of the seven main characters in the book and the voices each hears. Which one can you relate to the most and why?

Ev—he listens to the Almighty

Lissa—never good enough, failure, your fault

Katy Lynn—keep up appearances, no one will know

Silvano—you have to succeed, your family's future depends on it

Janelle—go home!

Ted—go, go, go and don't look back!

Stella—I'm getting too old to keep up this charade

On a drive back to Lookout Mountain after a meal at the MacAllister's, Ev tells Lissa the trick is to figure out which voice to listen to and which to ignore. Discuss. Have you done this?

At one point in the novel, Ev tells Lissa she needs to make a 'battle plan' to help her 'get past the now.' (p. 156). He adds, "I've learned that getting things out into the open, saying the truth about what is inside, usually speeds up the process of moving forward. Admitting it, facing it, and then planning a way to keep moving in the right direction." Do you agree or disagree? Do you have examples from your life to support your answer?

What is Ev's 'battle plan'? Discuss the concept of developing a battle plan. Have you ever used a technique like this in your life? Was it helpful?

Have you ever faced paralyzing fear? How did you overcome it?

Learning to drive again for Lissa becomes a metaphor for learning to live again. Discuss the symbolism.

The theme of grieving is woven throughout the novel. Near the end, Ev and Janelle have a conversation:

"...you've got to give yourself permission to keep grieving for as long as it takes."

"You never really get over it, do you?"

"No, sweetie, not exactly. But then, do we want to 'get over it'? The memory of Tate, the memory of Josh, is proof of their importance in our lives. I think we just hope to let the Almighty redeem the terrible scars..."

Discuss the different ways Ev, Janelle, Lissa and her father deal with grief. What are your thoughts on grieving?

What does Lookout Mountain symbolize to Ev? To Lissa?

In your opinion, who is the strongest character in the book and why?

Ted Draper is motivated by greed, which ends up getting him in big trouble. At one point, he rationalizes, Was it greedy to want to make the Million Dollar Club? Was it greedy to want a nice house and things for his kids ... or to want to save his marriage? Was it greedy to want to stay out of jail? (p. 214) and then a few pages later he thinks: Greed. Many brokers were tempted by greed. But his temptation was something much more basic. Survival. How had he plummeted from golden success to simple survival in one week? He did not know, but he prayed to the God of Mammon that his plan would work. Have you ever been tempted to rationalize obvious wrong choices? What was the outcome?

Think of Silvano's character and the deep responsibility he feels toward his family back in Italy. Discuss his motivations. How do you respond to pressure from loved ones?

Near the end of the novel, Ev explains to his daughters and granddaughter that: "Fame had ruined me once—it terrified me, the possibility of repeating the past ... Please believe me ... it wasn't to keep the truth from you—it was to protect you." (p. 338) Were Ev and Annie McAllister 'right' to have kept their secret for so many years? Why or why not?

Discuss the change and growth in Katy Lynn and Janelle's relationship. What is the catalyst for this growth?

Throughout much of the novel, Lissa and her father are at an impasse because of the way each one chooses to deal with grieving. Do they ever get past this impasse? If so, how?

Why and how does Lissa eventually come to hear different voices in her head?