

### Explore **Breathing Room** at a Deeper Level

- 1) Throughout the story, Evvy makes three 'secret' journeys. What happens on each journey? What does Evvy learn from each experience? What does each reveal about Evvy as a patient? As a friend? As a person?
- 2) What are Evvy's struggles in her first weeks at Loon Lake. Compare those to her struggles in her final weeks.
- 3) The author uses the poem "Invictus" as a window into Dena's character. If "Invictus" is the poem that best suits Dena's nature, can you find other poems (or even write one) that might fit the other characters in particular or the ordeal of the patients in general at Loon Lake.
- 4) Compare and contrast the attitudes and care provided by the different nurses, doctors, and hospital staff in the novel. What challenges do they face? Is there one right way to take care of these patients? Why or why not?
- 5) Compare Evvy's ward-mates: Pearl, Beverly, Dena, Sarah. How is each affected by the disease? Does each girl learn something or change because of her experience at Loon Lake? How does Evvy benefit from knowing each girl?
- 6) Consider Evvy's relationships with her mother, father, brother and grandmothers. Do those relationships change over the course of the novel? Why or why not? If they do change, how? What evidence can you provide that shows those changes?
- 7) Though most of the novel is set inside the sanatorium, the outside world is still significant. In what ways? What illustrations connect the reader to the outside world? What is the significance of the language used in the illustration at the start of Chapter 11?
- 8) Consider the importance of gifts in the novel, those Evvy receives and those she gives. Which are the most important and why?
- 9) Consider the various letters in the novel. Pick any of the letters and explain what it reveals about both the person writing the letter and its effects on the person receiving it.

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- 10) Newbery Medal winner Linda Sue Park describes Evvy as a “quiet hero.” In what ways is Evvy a hero? What are Evvy’s strengths and how do those qualities help her throughout the story? How do they help others?
- 11) What are Evvy’s flaws? How do they complicate things for her at Loon Lake Sanatorium? What evidence can you provide that she matures over the course of the novel?
- 12) What is the significance of Evvy’s stuffed bear Francy in the story?
- 13) The reader only sees Evvy’s twin brother Abe briefly in the novel and yet her relationship to him is key. How does she feel about him when she first arrives at Loon Lake, as she settles in, over time through their letters, and by the end? How do you think Evvy’s illness and experience affect their relationship as sister and brother?
- 14) How does Evvy’s relationship with her mother change over the course of the novel? Why?
- 15) In Chapter 11 called “The New Bug,” Evvy thinks to herself how she might describe Dena, Pearl and Beverly to Sarah. Would she use those same terms describe the girls by the novel’s end? How do her feelings for the three girls change over the course of the story? Why?
- 16) Evvy and Sarah’s friendship has its ups and downs over the course of the novel. Why? How does each girl benefit from the friendship?
- 17) Consider how the fans purchased by Pearl take on a greater significance throughout the novel.
- 18) In the early chapters, Evvy must learn how to be a patient. What challenges does she face? What adjustments are the hardest for her? What skills does she have to get through these challenges? In what way must she continue to learn to be a patient over the rest of the novel?
- 19) Trace the changes in Evvy’s relationship with her mother over the course of the novel.

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- 20) Which character do you think is most important in helping Evvy survive her experience at Loon Lake? Why?
- 21) In what ways has Evvy changed by the end of the novel? To what or to whom do you attribute those changes?
- 22) Compare the first and final chapters of the book. How are they similar? Different? What does each reveal about Evvy and her relationships with her family?
- 23) If **Breathing Room** is also a story about friendship, compare and contrast the friendships throughout the novel. Do the friends always get along? Could you make a statement about the nature of friendship in general based on the examples in the book?
- 24) Consider the ironic use of certain words or phrases—such as ‘taking the cure,’ ‘going home,’ ‘throwing a ruby,’ or having your ‘name on a box’ –at Loon Lake Sanatorium. What makes each ironic? Can you think of any reason the patients might use these terms?
- 25) Do you see this novel as being more about loss or survival?
- 26) Which characters do you think most influence Evvy throughout the course of the novel?
- 27) Which of the novel’s many letters do you think is most important? Why?

## Discover What Happens in **Breathing Room**

- 1) What do we learn about Evvy and her family—and her relationship with her brother, father and mother, in the opening two chapters?
- 2) Why is the second chapter called *Loonless Lake*? What else may the author intend for the reader to feel by titling the chapter this way?
- 3) How does Nurse Marshall treat Evvy throughout Chapters 3-7? What is the nurse's philosophy about patient care? How does she pronounce Evelyn's first name and what effect does that have on her?
- 4) What are some of the adjustments Evvy has to make her first days at Loon Lake? Which challenges do you think are the hardest for her and why?
- 5) Why is Chapter 9 called *A Different Tune*? What changes for Evvy in this chapter?
- 6) Consider the Loon Lake Sanatorium Schedule before Chapter 10. Compare that document with the newspaper before Chapter 11 and the illustration at the start of Chapter 11. On their own, what story do they tell? Together how do they add to the story?
- 7) Describe Evvy's mood in Chapter 10. What are some specific examples that show how "gloomy" Evvy feels "inside and out"?
- 8) What changes for Evvy in Chapters 11-13? How does this change affect her?
- 9) Describe Abe's first letter to Evvy and her reactions to it?
- 10) Why is Chapter 14 called *The Giant*? Is that a fitting description? Why or why not?
- 11) What does Evvy learn about Beverly in Chapter 15 that surprises Evvy? What advice does Beverly give Evvy?
- 12) By Chapter 15, the reader has met Evvy's most important roommates—Dena, Pearl, Beverly, and Sarah. What does Evvy think of each one? How do the various girls get along? What issues do they face individually and as roommates?
- 13) Compare the letters written by Evvy's mother and father at the end of Chapter 16. What does each letter reveal about the writer and the writer's relationship with Evvy?
- 14) What happens in Chapter 17 *Flying Away*? What is significant about this particular night? What does the end of the chapter reveal about Dena and Pearl?
- 15) Why is Chapter 19 called *Numbers*? Does that title refer to more than one thing in that chapter?
- 16) What is a discharge order? What is the significance of Chapter 21's title, *Looking Back*?
- 17) What secret is revealed in Chapter 22? Why did this information have to be a secret?
- 18) What gifts do the girls receive in Chapter 24 and from whom? Why are these gifts important? Who gives them and what does that show about the character?

- 19) Why is Chapter 25 called *The Ruby*? What event takes place? What is the significance of the letter that follows the chapter?
- 20) Chapter 26 is called *A Different Tune*. Discuss at least three ways in which things are now different for Evvy. What changes have taken place and how are the characters each affected? What lesson must Evvy learn? When Evvy says, “That was my music” at the chapter’s end, what is she talking about?
- 21) Discuss the gifts in Chapters 27-30. Consider the gifts given—or not—and the ‘gift’ Dr. Keith gives Evvy in Chapter 30.
- 22) What is the warning Evvy gets in Chapter 32? How does she get the message? What decision does Evvy make?
- 23) Explain the significance of the titles *Finding Her* (Chapter 33) and *Losing Her* (Chapter 34). What is the importance of the fan pictured at the beginning of Chapter 34? How does Sarah help Evvy in this chapter?
- 24) To whom does Evvy say goodbye in Chapter 35? What gift does Evvy give? What does Dena mean when she says, “Just go on”?
- 25) What does Evvy mean by “Bed Post,” the words also used as the title of Chapter 37? What are the advantages to communicating in this new way?
- 26) What happens on the *Midnight Journey* (Chapter 38)? Discuss the letter Evvy writes Abe that appears at the end of Chapter 38. How does it compare to her earlier letters to her family? Why the change?
- 27) What information is Evvy hesitant to share in Chapter 39? Why? Does the information get shared?
- 28) Why does Evvy name her poem “Morning” (found just before Chapter 41)? Why would she write this poem?
- 29) What is the final gift given in the novel? What is its significance?
- 30) Compare and contrast the opening and closing chapters of the novel.



**From Beginning  
to End:  
Changes in Evvy's Thoughts  
and Feelings  
in *Breathing Room***

Evvy's first days  
at  
Loon Lake Sanatorium

Evvy's last days  
at  
Loon Lake Sanatorium

Evvy thinks...  
Evvy wishes...  
Evvy regrets...  
Evvy struggles with...  
Evvy worries that...  
Evvy wants...  
Evvy learns that...

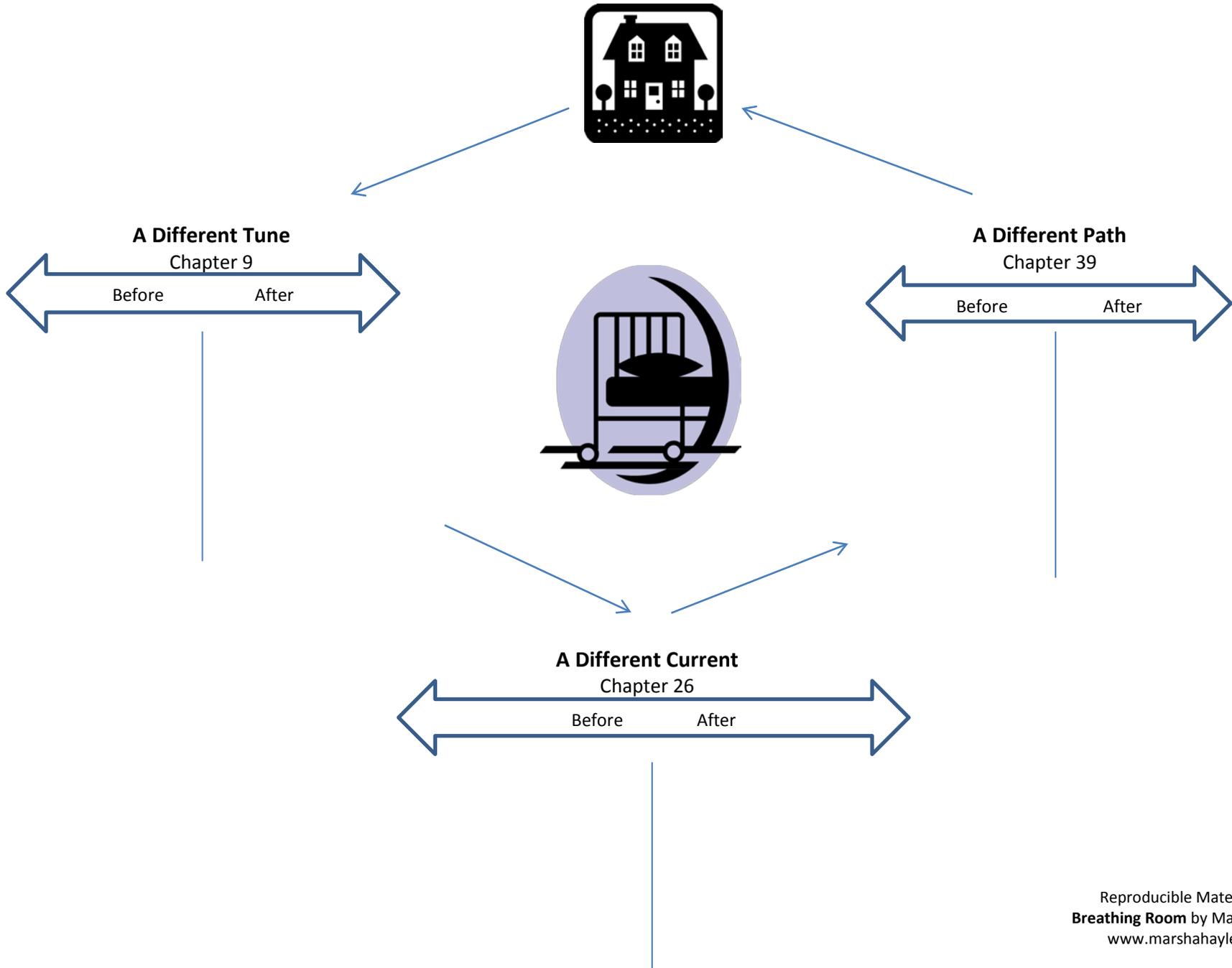
List in the  
box below  
at least  
**4**  
events  
that change  
Evvy's  
thoughts  
and  
feelings  
from  
story's  
beginning  
to end.

Evvy thinks...  
Evvy wishes...  
Evvy regrets...  
Evvy struggles with...  
Evvy worries that...  
Evvy wants...  
Evvy learns that...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

# Evvy's Journey in Breathing Room

Consider Evvy's journey by comparing what Evvy thinks, feels, and understands before and after each of the following key chapters.



## OBJECTS in BREATHING ROOM

Objects can often give the reader insight into a character's personality or the story's plot. Draw a line from each object to the character or characters (listed in the middle column) you associate with it. Some objects will connect with more than one character.

On the line, explain the significance of the object to the person and the story.

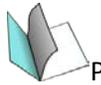


Teddy Bear

**EVVY**



Red Journal



Photoplay Magazine

*PEARL*



Photo of a brother



**DENA**

Fan with a fish

**BEVERLY**



Six-sided star

Fan with a peacock

Fan with a dragon

**SARAH**



Bottle caps

Fan with a diploma

Fan with a chicken

**NURSE GUNDERSON**

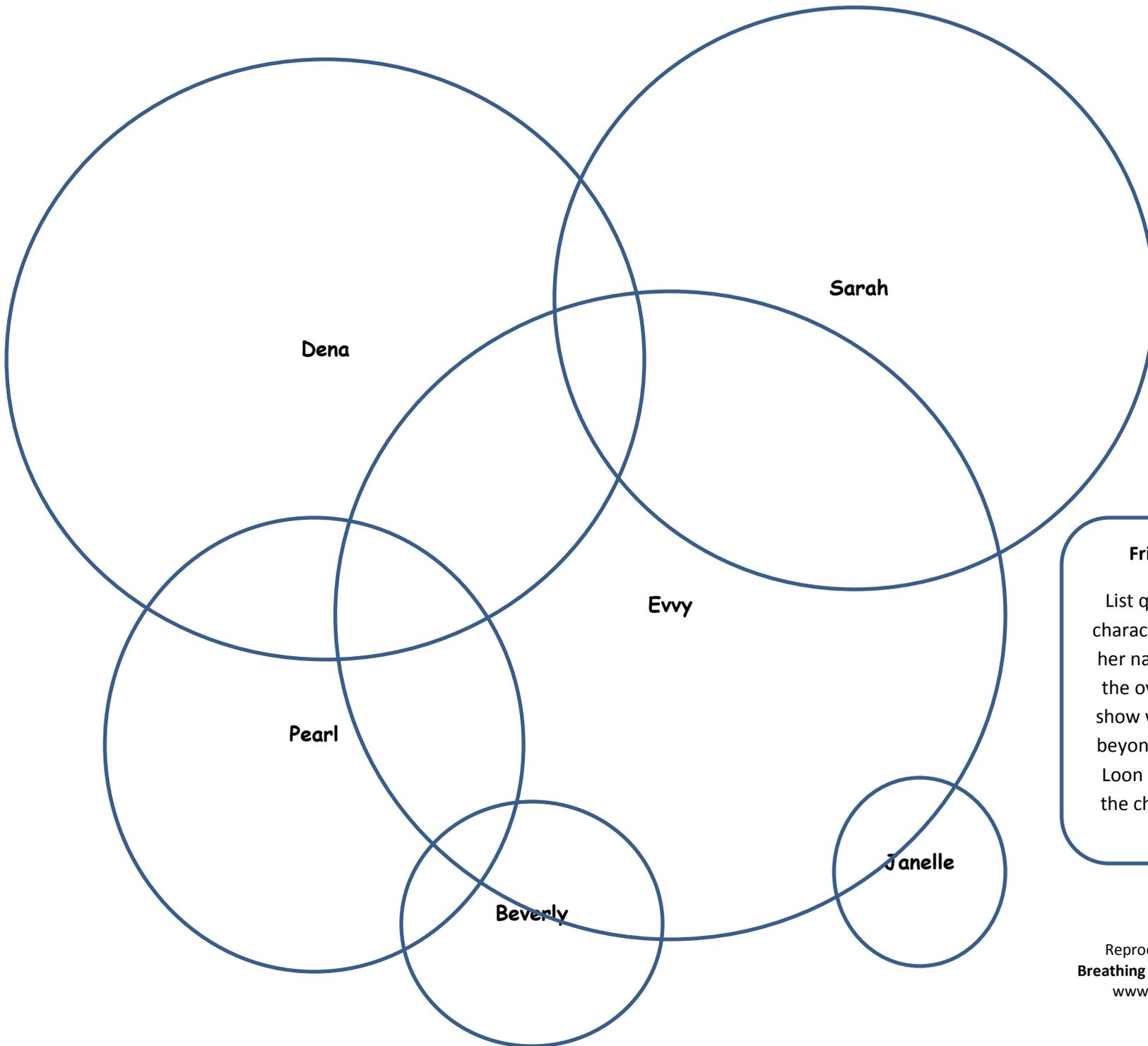


Face mask

Fan with an ocean scene

**NURSE MARSHALL**

Fan with a white horse



### Friendship Circles

List qualities about each character in the circle with her name on it. Then use the overlapping areas to show what connections—beyond sharing a room at Loon Lake Sanatorium—the characters have with each other.

## 4-Paragraph Essay Topics on **Breathing Room**

- 1) Though Evvy spends much of the novel away from her parents, her relationship with each parent is important. Develop an essay with one body paragraph devoted Evvy's relationship with her father and a second paragraph focused on her mother.  
Do the relationships change over the course of the novel? Why? How?  
By novel's end, how has Evvy changed in any ways because of her parents' influence or help?  
How does each parent help her?
- 2) Throughout the story, characters give and receive gifts from each other. Pick two gifts and explain the significance of each—both to the giver and to the receiver—and to the story overall.
- 3) Compare and contrast Nurse Marshall and Nurse Gunderson in the novel. What is each nurse's strength? How does Evvy benefit from each nurse's skills? How does each affect Evvy?
- 4) Compare and contrast the opening and closing chapters of the novel. Consider the changes in Evvy and her relationship with each of her parents.
- 5) Compare and contrast Evvy's relationship with Sarah and Dena. What struggles does Evvy have with each girl? What does she learn from each? How does Evvy help them both? Can you draw any conclusions about the importance of friendship during difficult times?
- 6) Though Pearl and Dena are not the main characters in the novel, they both still have a profound impact on Evvy and her experience at Loon Lake Sanatorium. Discuss each character and her importance in the novel.
- 7) The brochure for Loon Lake Sanatorium (found after Chapter 1) encourages new arrivals to be "patient patients." Does this always describe Evvy? Describe ways she both learns to accept the rules at Loon Lake and ways in which she rejects them. Is she right or wrong for choosing to disobey? What are the consequences? What are the benefits?

## 5-Paragraph Essay Topics on **Breathing Room**

- 1) Nurse Marshall tells Evvy in Chapter 6 that she is not at Loon Lake “to make friends “but to defeat her disease. By novel’s end, Evvy might say that she could not do one without the other.  
Consider what Evvy learns from the other girls, especially Pearl, Dena and Sarah, over the course of the story about herself, survival, and friendship. Devote a paragraph to each of the three girls OR organize your essay by comparing and contrasting what Evvy learns from each girl about herself, survival, and friendship.  
  
Keep in mind the following:  
Would Evvy call each of these girls a friend? Why or why not? Does that change?  
How does Evvy grow and gain insight by knowing each of these girls?
- 2) If *Breathing Room* is a survival story, consider three skills or strategies Evvy develops that help her through the experience.  
Keep in mind the following:  
How is Evvy different by the novel’s end? Why?  
How does Evvy overcome setbacks? Does she always succeed?
- 3) Compare and contrast the three secret journeys Evvy makes throughout the story. What is the purpose of each trip? What does Evvy learn about others and herself? What are the implications of each of these journeys for Evvy and for other characters in the novel?
- 4) The author uses the word “different” in the titles of three chapters. Those chapters each signal a major change for Evvy. Analyze what makes each chapter significant in Evvy’s larger journey as a patient at Loon Lake.
- 5) Throughout the story, characters give and receive gifts from each other. Pick three gifts and explain the significance of each –both to the giver and to the receiver—and to the story overall.
- 6) Analyze the importance of Evvy’s relationship with her brother Abe throughout the novel—from her first days at Loon Lake, through the letters they exchange and her thoughts about them, and finally the events at the close of the story. In what way is their relationship key to Evvy’s sense of herself? How do her feelings change about Abe over the course of the novel? How does having a twin both help and hinder Evvy throughout the story?

## Get Creative With **Breathing Room**

- 1) Create a story using only letters written back and forth between characters.
- 2) When Evvy first gets to Loon Lake, all her senses must adjust to the unfamiliar sights, sounds and sensations of the sanatorium. Write a story in which the main character is forced to adjust to a strange and new setting. Pay attention to details that will appeal to your reader's senses.
- 3) Use the chapter titles from the table of contents—and your own additional words-- to create a poem about the story, a particular character, or an event that happens in the novel—or maybe in your own life.
- 4) Make your own Loon Lake Booster (found before Chapter 18) pretending to write the stories and poems from the various characters in the novel.
- 5) Write the poem that Evvy will send to Sarah after the story's end.
- 6) Write the first letter Evvy will send to Sarah after the story's end. Then write Sarah's response.
- 7) Find poems or make up some on your own that fit another character in the way "Invictus" suits Dena.
- 8) **Breathing Room** makes use of photos and ephemera from the time period to help tell the story. Pick one of the photos or illustrations and use it to write a story or a poem of your own set in the 1930's or 1940's.
- 9) Imagine if you—like Evvy—had to leave your family and home. Who and what would you miss most and why? You could either write down your response or put together a collage that you might imagine taking with you as a way to remember home.
- 10) Write a story from Abe's point of view that takes place while Evvy is at Loon Lake Sanatorium.