

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?