

The Printed Letter Bookshop: Discussion Questions

1. The author begins the story with three different verb tenses. What did she mean to convey with each choice? Did each character fit this portrayal for her voice and her story?
2. Janet contends, “The past holds no hope” and chooses not to dwell there. How do her feelings change? Later she states, “Not looking to the past is not the same as living in the present.” What does she mean?
3. Aunt Maddie and her letters exert an influence on the three women. The author calls out another character, who also exerts power over a story despite not being in a single scene. Contrast Aunt Maddie’s influence with Rebecca’s, from Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*. Is it true, as Madeline’s mother states, that “even dead and gone, a person or an event can affect lives, for good or for bad...?”
4. Perspective is an important theme in *The Printed Letter Bookshop*. How does Madeline’s perspective change? Janet’s? Claire’s? How much do each misjudge in the beginning? How clearly does each see things in the end?
5. “For the present is the point at which time touches eternity.” This quote by C.S. Lewis sits near the dedication and is alluded to by Chris and Madeline. What does it mean? How is this revealed within the story?
6. Janet asks at one point, “What is a heroine?” What are some of your thoughts about characters and what constitutes a hero or heroine?
7. How did you feel about Claire switching from third person to first? What drove her to reclaim her voice? How easy it is for someone to lose his or her voice?
8. Awakening is another theme within each woman’s story. Discuss the “trail of breadcrumbs” Maddie left each.
9. Janet confesses that she has never said she was sorry. Do you know people like that? How easy or hard would it be to live by that rule? How easy or difficult is to say you’re sorry for something you’ve done or to someone you’ve hurt?
10. Claire says she has to “appropriate the stories, make them my own, find my own voice, and learn...” Greg Frankel lists a series of books to help teenagers-at-risk. What have fiction stories taught you? Do they hold as much power as Claire and Greg believe? Can fiction truly affect change in our lives?

11. Claire talks about the order of love. Do you agree or disagree that love can be “wrongly ordered” or harm rather than bring life? Do you feel she was too hard on herself regarding Brittany’s attitude and actions?
12. Madeline says to Chris “Because until you know the truth, you shouldn’t judge people.” Does she follow that edict? If she does at the end, when did she begin? Who helps her along the way?
13. Would you like to visit the women of Winsome again?