

1. The Willows provides an important backdrop for *Silent Voices*, and the novel begins and ends in that setting—a faded hotel and health club that retains vestiges of glamor. As Vera puts it, “the place was like the centre of a spider’s web.” How does the Willows tie our various characters together? How might the story have changed with a different setting?
2. The novel’s victim, Jenny Lister, was many things to many people in her life: mother, social worker, aspiring writer, and lover. In the beginning, Vera calls her “Saint Jenny.” How do Jenny’s secrets change Vera’s original opinion of Jenny? What about the other character’s in the novels? Had your own view of Jenny changed by the final pages?
3. The first time the reader meets Connie, she’s completely ostracized from her small community, but we aren’t yet aware why. Does your understanding of the community’s resentment change as you learn about Connie’s past? How might you have reacted in a similar situation?
4. The words “friendship” and “admiration” crop up often throughout the novel. How are these two words different? How do you think Vera herself views the distinction between the two words, especially compared to how, for instance, Joe might see them?
5. In Chapter 21, Vera muses “this case was all about families, the weird ties between kids and their parents.” Of the various families involved in *Silent Voices*, which parent and child do you feel had the strongest relationship—bearing in mind that “strongest” does not necessarily mean “healthiest”?
6. The relationship between men and women also plays a large role in *Silent Voices*, whether that be the relationship between Vera and Joe, Simon and Hannah, Mattie and Michael, or even Simon and Jenny. At one point, Vera thinks that “Love gives us license to do what we like.” How does that belief play out in these various relationships?
7. The revelation about Veronica Eliot’s past is, in many ways, the beginning of the end of the case. As the truth about Patrick, and then her relationship to Mattie, emerges, did your understanding of her character change? Given the identity of the murderer, how do you imagine a woman like Veronica might move forward?
8. Towards the end of the novel, Vera makes the decision not to include Joe in her thought process and theories on the murderer. Do you think this was the right choice? Given the

ability to see things from Vera's point of view, do you think Joe would have agreed with that decision?

9. The final line of this novel belongs, of course, to Vera Stanhope herself. Holly has commented that Alice will now be terrified of water after her ordeal in the final pages, and Vera returns, "Or she could turn out to be an Olympic swimmer." Is this a more optimistic response than you might have expected from Vera? How does this final line further your understanding of Vera's personality and her view of the world?