

Reading Guide Questions for Discussion

1. Charlotte is continually trying to reassure herself that she didn't really collaborate. She wasn't dining on tournedos of beef and bottles of Saint-Émilion with Nazis. She never turned anyone in. Are there degrees of collaboration, and if so, how do you determine where to draw the line?
2. Was Charlotte right to raise Vivi believing a lie? If not, how and when could she have told her the truth?
3. Mr. Rosenblum, who has survived a concentration camp, absolves Charlotte of guilt. Hannah, who spends her life listening to tales of horror and trying to minister to those who have suffered it, refuses to forgive Charlotte. What do you think their different reactions are based on? Does someone who has not suffered have as great a right to judge as someone who has?
4. Julian believes he sacrificed honor, honesty, and his family to survive. If he had refused to serve in Hitler's army would it have done any good?
5. Why do you think Charlotte answered Julian's letters after the war and tried to help him?
6. The book begins with a quote from a young girl who lived in Paris during the Occupation about being able to hate in the abstract but not in individual instances. This phenomenon is generally recognized as an antidote to prejudice. If you live next door to a member of a minority, it is harder to hate that minority. How does this phenomenon apply to the hatred of oppressors and tyrants?
7. Charlotte spends a good deal of time worrying and talking about moral compasses—her own, her daughter's, her late husband's, her lover Julian's. Hannah spends her time doing good. Can people who commit immoral acts be moral people? How does this relate to Hannah and Charlotte?
8. If your child was caught in a moral bind between turning in her best friend for cheating and ignoring the infraction, what would you advise her?
9. In the last scene in the book, Horace tells Charlotte she would have been better off if she'd stayed in Paris and suffered the consequences of her choices rather than getting off scot-free and spending the rest of her life punishing herself. Do you agree with this sentiment? Why or why not?

