



1. Discuss the ways in which Kate Cavanaugh and her family grapple with grief, even two years after Kyle's death. Should Kate and the children be further along in the grieving process by now? What holds them up? Is the grieving process longer and more gradual than perhaps our society permits? In what ways can you relate to Kate's struggles? What is universal about grief, and what about it is more specific to our culture?
2. How do you feel about Kate's friendship with Marge? Would you welcome a friend like Marge or resent her intrusions into your life? What does Marge lack in her own life that Kate supplies? Conversely, what does Marge give to Kate and her family? Consider how this relationship grows and changes during the course of the story. How does Kyle factor into the friendship? Would there have been a friendship between Kate and Marge without Kyle in the picture?
3. Consider the relationships between Kate Cavanaugh and her daughter, Charlotte. Is Kate a bad mother? Can you raise an adolescent child without addressing at least some of the problems Charlotte introduces in this novel? For example, to what extent are children today at risk because of the Internet and relentless media exposure to sex?
4. Should Kate do more for her son, Hunter, to bring him out of his shell, or to help him express himself "in complete sentences"? What is the symbolism of the novel's title, *Love in Complete Sentences*? What was the author trying to say about this family and their struggle to become whole again?
5. Early in the story, Kate confesses, "*I try to hide my loathing for my work by walking into school with a happy smile each morning.*" Later, however, while referring to the students in her New Frontiers group, she says, "*I'm grateful for the sight of these children who come to me willingly, unlike my Charlotte. They honor the tiny, undamaged part of me still capable of comforting someone else.*" Discuss the importance of Kate's work as a guidance counselor at the Alan B. Shepard High School. In what ways is Kate perhaps more effective as a counselor than she is as a mother? Does this change? If so, how and why?
6. How does Phoenix's suicide compound Kate's grief and compel her to act in wise and unwise ways? Did Phoenix's suicide seem realistic to you? Why or why not?

A
Reading
Group
Guide



7. Kate walks the tricky line between professional colleague and personal friend in her relationship with department head Tom Johnson. Does Tom want more than a friendship with Kate? Does Jack? When Kate approaches Tom to ask for a leave of absence, he tells her a story of his own loss. What motivates Tom to share this with her?
8. What are your impressions of Foster Willis and Kate's rocky romance? Do you think their relationship might evolve into something more serious? Why do Kate's children so dislike Foster? What holds Kate back from being closer to him? When can one be ready for love, again, after a great loss?
9. Was Kate's failed road trip to Texas ill advised, or did she and her family perhaps reap unexpected benefit in leaving behind their home and work and schools? Have you ever made a major life decision that in retrospect seemed clearly unwise? What triggered that decision? Did any good come of it? What triggered Kate's doomed road trip?
10. How does the author make use of humor in this novel? Did you find the presence of Kyle's ghost amusing or sad, or both? Do you think there is a place for humor in a story about a family's tragic loss? What is the role, if any, of humor in the process of grief?
11. Kyle's mother offers Kate a new perspective on her marriage to Kyle. How does this perspective influence Kate's thoughts about her marriage? What role does Kate's parents, or anyone's parents, play in the decision to marry?
12. Kate refers to her daughter, Charlotte, who is missing from school, as just another *American in space*. Throughout the book, Kate refers to herself and others in this way. What is the meaning of this metaphor and how does it apply to Kate, her family, and American society in general?
13. Did certain parts of this book make you uncomfortable? If so, why? Did it lead you to a new understanding or awareness of some aspect of your life you might not have thought about before?

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