



1. In *Coming Up for Air*, Patti Callahan Henry delves into the complicated relationships between mothers and daughters, and how, often, they are not understood even after death. Do you think Ellie's relationship with her mother is true to life? Have you experienced or seen a relationship like theirs? How do you feel it compares to or is echoed by Ellie's relationship with her daughter, Lil?
2. Ellie reconnects with Hutch when she's in a very vulnerable place. Do you think Ellie's extraordinary circumstances influenced their reunion in any way, perhaps fast-tracking intimacy? Did Hutch just reenter her life at the right time? Or was it Hutch who awakened Ellie to the truth?
3. Ellie's mother's journal entries play a key role in *Coming Up for Air*—in what they reveal about Lily's past and how they define Ellie's choices in the present. How does having access to her mother's journal impact Ellie? Do you think it's okay to read someone's journal, even after they're gone? Would you be comfortable with someone reading yours?
4. In your opinion, what is the significance of the title *Coming Up for Air*? How does it tie into the larger themes of the novel, and into each character's personal story? Have you ever felt as if you needed to "come up for air" but were unable?
5. Ellie reads in her mother's journals that Lily missed out on love when she was younger, a pivotal moment that fundamentally changed who she was. How do you think heartbreak defined Lily—as a woman and as a mother? Do you think it's true to life that one powerful heartbreak can ruin or profoundly impact someone's life in this way? If heartbreak can impact us in this way, what are our choices in how?
6. *Coming Up for Air* takes place in the South—where Patti Callahan Henry is from, and where she tends to set her novels. Are you drawn to the Southern setting? What do you think makes the South so intriguing to novelists and readers in general?
7. Do you agree or sympathize with Ellie's choices in the end of the novel? How do you think you might have acted in her situation? Similarly? Differently? Have you ever had to make a choice that you knew would hurt someone you love, but was the right one for you?

Discussion Questions

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