

Butterflies in May

Group Topics for Discussion

1. “Everything in your life can change in a single instant,” is the opening line in Chapter 1. We then learn Ali’s period is “MIA—missing in action,” that Ali has a boyfriend, and that they have chosen to become sexually active. We also learn that during Ali’s junior year of high school, she wrote a series of articles for the school newspaper, *The Voice*, about teens and sex, which were never published because the school board voted unanimously to stop the series because they found them to be “suggestive” and might “encourage the ‘children’ to have sex.” Ali tells us: “Obviously, the authorities here don’t realize that when it comes to sex, no one asks their parents for permission first.”
 - a. What are Ali’s views about teenage sex?
 - b. Do you think Ali would be for or against abstinence-only education and why?
 - c. Do you think she regrets having taken her relationship with Matt to a sexual level?
2. It is in Chapter 1, too, that we learn about Ali’s relationship with Matt—how they met and how their relationship progressed. Yet, later in this same chapter, when Monica laments that she is still a virgin, Ali says, “Don’t be in such a hurry.”
 - a. What do you think Ali’s views are on sexual morality, values, and peer pressure?
3. In many ways, Ali appears to be a strong person. She’s a journalism student and an observer of life. She understands the responsibilities that come with sexual behavior, and she and Matt usually take precautions. She buys a pregnancy test when she misses a period, but then delays taking it. When she does finally have her pregnancy confirmed at a clinic, she doesn’t tell Matt right away.
 - a. Why do you think Ali puts off telling Matt?
 - b. Do you think her pregnancy is real to her?
 - c. Why or why not?
4. After Ali takes the home pregnancy kit (Chapter 3), she is faced with the dilemma of responsibility and choice.
 - a. What feelings does Ali have about each of her options that you most and least identify with?
5. On the day when Ali arrives at the clinic for the abortion (Chapter 7), she changes her mind at the last minute.
 - a. What clues does author Karen Hart give the reader that Ali may have ambivalent feelings?
 - b. What aspects of Ali’s feelings do you most and least identify with?

- c. Do you think the protestors outside the clinic had any impact on Ali's final decision? Why or Why not?
 - d. How do you think this story might have ended if Ali had gone through with the abortion?
 - e. Would you describe Ali as pro-choice, pro-life or somewhere in between and why?
6. Consider the structure of *Butterflies in May*. Ali doesn't tell her parents that she is pregnant until Chapter 9. And as close as Ali is to Matt, he is largely left out of the decision of what to do.
 - a. Why sorts of decisions do you think Hart had to make in shaping and editing Ali's pregnancy and decision-making process?
7. Like Ali, Matt believes abortion is the best option for their situation. In Chapter 8, he's upset when he discovers that Ali didn't go through with the abortion.
 - a. What aspects of Matt's feelings do you most and least identify with?
8. Kate Parker encourages her daughter to place the baby for adoption, but Ali can't imagine "handing off her baby to some couple my mother hears about in a doctor's office." Later, in Chapter 12, she compares her situation to driving down the highway. "When I was in second or third grade, I used to play this game in the car. We'd be driving down the highway, and I thought I could make everything stand still by willing it. Mom, Dad, and I were in the car, frozen in time, while the road and the scenery did all the moving. I didn't realize that I was reversing my point of view. That's how I feel lately—as if everything is moving and changing so fast. But I'm standing still."
 - a. What does this passage tell us about Ali and her situation at that time?
9. Initially, Monica doesn't get along with her stepbrother, Kyle, and yet as the story progresses they become attracted to each other.
 - a. What aspects of their relationship do you most and least identify with?
10. Teen pregnancy is a heavy topic and yet, Hart weaves through yet another heavy topic—reckless driving—which involves Niles Sherman and his girlfriend Tory.
 - a. How do you think the accident that ends Tory and her best friend's life affect Ali and Matt?
 - b. What is the essential theme of both Ali's story and this subplot? Why do you think Hart chose to weave in such a subplot?
 - c. Do you think this development had an impact on why Ali decided to keep her baby at this time?
 - d. Do you think it explains why Matt gave Ali an engagement ring Christmas Day?
11. Ali is editor of the high school paper and usually feels comfortable working with words, yet as she is faced with an unintended pregnancy, she loses her voice as a

- writer. It's a photography class that helps her see things from a different perspective.
- a. Through photographs, what does Ali learn about the people around her such as Niles?
 - b. About her mother?
 - c. And what impact does she experience from a photo taken of her and Matt by Monica before spring break?
12. Ali's relationship with her mother is distant at the beginning of the novel.
- a. How does it change over the course of the story?
 - b. How did you feel about Ali's mother at the end of the story?
13. How did your feelings for Matt evolve over the course of the story?
- a. How would you compare Matt, as he behaved in Chapter 1, to the Matt who breaks off his relationship with Ali in Chapter 20?
 - b. Were you surprised that he broke off the relationship?
 - c. Why or why not?
14. In Chapter 20, Carrot Top says, "Hamlet has no center. He's the man who thinks too much, who can't make up his mind, who never wholly commits to anything."
- a. Is Matt like Hamlet?
 - b. Why or why not?
15. Of all the characters in *Butterflies in May*, Hart chooses Niles to tell Ali that having the baby is brave. "Having this baby ... is very cool. You're the bravest chick I know."
- a. Why do you think the author chose Niles to articulate this?
16. In the latter part of the book, Hart uses Ali's dreams several times to move the story forward and to give us insight into Ali's mental and emotional state.
- a. What do those dreams reveal to us?
 - b. Do you think Ali's final dream about Jonah turning into a dove and flying away affects her decision to place her baby for adoption?
17. After Ali signs the adoption papers, she describes the complex ambivalence she feels as a "tug of war" between her head and her heart in Chapter 22.
- a. What aspects of Ali's feelings do you most and least relate to?
 - b. At the end of the story, do you think that Ali is certain she made the best decision for her situation?
 - c. Why or why not?
 - d. Do you think Matt experienced the same ambivalence throughout the course of the story?
18. Both pro-choice and pro-life readers have embraced *Butterflies in May*.
- a. What is it about this novel that enables the reader to get past politics?
 - b. What essential theme is the great equalizer of this story?

19. Hart introduces one last character, Ethan, in the book's final few pages.
- a. Do you think Ali is ready for another serious relationship?
 - b. Why or why not?
 - c. What do you think Ali has learned from her experience?
 - d. Do you think Monica will jump into another serious relationship?
20. What range of emotions did you experience while reading *Butterflies in May*?
- a. As you look back, which particular scenes do you recall being affected by the most?
 - b. Which were the most frightening, painful, compelling, and inspiring?
21. Why is the novel titled *Butterflies in May*?
- a. What does the butterfly symbolize in this novel?
 - b. Why do you think the author chose to end the story with Ali running?
 - c. If you had one question you could ask the author, what would it be?