

Questions for Discussion

Peace Is a Four-Letter Word

by Janet Nichols Lynch

Chapter 1

1. Most of the novel is told in flashback. How far does the narration go back in time and what object triggers the flashback?
2. What are Emily's first impressions of Connell?
3. What are Emily's reactions to Scott's Uncle Gary after visiting him at the pet shop?
4. Why do you think Emily and Scott are in a relationship?
5. Why do you think Emily is close friends with Lindsay and Skylar? Describe the personalities of the three girls. How are they different and how are they the same?
6. When Emily tries to move closer to Scott in his car, she discovers that her bag of new books is between them. What might be the figurative meaning of the placement of the books?
7. Discuss Emily's conflicted feelings about the ring Scott gives her.
8. Why doesn't Emily buy Connell's book when she is at the mall with her friends?

Chapter 2

1. What does Emily get out of cheerleading?
2. What personality conflict between Emily and Scott becomes apparent during their Saturday night date?
3. After her wild night out with Lindsay and Skylar, why does Emily tell her mom "I'm so old"?

Chapter 3

1. Discuss the positive and negative aspects of Emily's relationship with her mother.
2. How does Emily feel about her mother when she introduces her to Connell?
3. Why do you think Emily's mother calls Connell "an unhappy woman"?

Chapter 4

1. How does Emily react when Connell postpones the history test? What does this tell you about Emily's personality?
2. Discuss the positive and negative aspects of Emily becoming Connell's research assistant.

Chapter 5

1. Why is Emily the only one in her group of friends who wants to protest the U.S. invasion of the Persian Gulf?
2. Why does Emily write to her congressman? Have you ever written to a public official? Do you think this is an effective way to voice your opinions?

Chapter 6

1. Why does Emily compare protesting the war to visiting a nude beach?
2. Why does Connell refuse to wear a yellow ribbon?
3. What are three main reasons Emily grows closer to Connell?
4. How does Scott react to Emily's appearance as a war protester in the newspaper? Are his feelings justified?
5. Carlos's reasoning about Scott going to Winter Formal with Lindsay is that "women can feel, speak, and think all at the same time. Guys act, then think." Do you agree with Carlos or is he being sexist? Draw from personal experience to support your answer.
6. When Emily refuses to go to Winter Formal with Carlos, Lindsay tells her, "I can't believe you're being so selfish. You're going to wreck everything." Is either girl, or both girls, or neither girl at fault in this rift in their friendship?

Chapter 7

1. Why does Scott agree to help the Rankins pick their oranges?

Chapter 8

1. Predict how the Big Freeze of 1990 will affect the lives of Emily and her family. Who else will be impacted by the loss of the crops?
2. Why is it helpful to Emily that Elena Ginsberg invites her to dinner? Is Elena a more suitable friend for Emily than Lindsay and Skylar? Would Elena fit in Emily's group of friends at school? Drawing from your personal experience, is it possible to have close friends outside your usual group?

Chapter 9

1. What impact did the freeze have on Emily's feelings toward Christmas? Have you ever felt depressed at a happy occasion?
2. Why is Emily concerned about her grandparents' Christmas visit?
3. How does Emily feel about the American flag pin Scott gives her for Christmas? What did the flag symbolize to her before she protested the Persian Gulf War, and what does it symbolize now? Can someone who protests a war be as patriotic as someone who supports U.S. military action?
4. What do the red tags symbolize at Mrs. Rankin's New Year's Eve party? What is her purpose in having the party, and why does it backfire?

Chapter 10

1. Why does Connell want her history class to attend the town meeting? Why are her students reluctant to go? Why is it important for high school students to be interested in politics?
2. Why does Emily leave Scott and her friends at the town meeting and walk alone at night?
3. How does attending the town meeting change Emily's view of Visalia?
4. What concerns about her mother does Emily discuss with her father on the drive home?
5. What does Emily mean when she tells her mother, "It's like peace is a four-letter word"?

Chapter 11

1. What does Emily learn about Connell by visiting her early Sunday morning?
2. Compare and contrast Emily's parents' marriage and the McKenzies' marriage. What positive and negative aspects does Emily see in each marriage? What causes Emily to be confused about marriage in general?

Chapter 12

1. Why does Emily refuse to complete her cheerleading squad's pyramid at the basketball game? Is her action justified? How does Emily's mother respond to her behavior? How do her friends feel about it?
2. Why does Ryan think he can view the bombing outside his window? Has the United States ever been bombed during a war?
3. What are Emily's reasons for quitting the cheerleading team?

Chapter 13

1. Does Scott support Emily's behavior at the basketball game? How does he feel about her quitting the cheerleading team?
2. Explain the irony in Emily and Scott's "war" of the rotten oranges. Is getting physical sometimes a valid way to blow off steam in a tense situation? Share your personal experiences in your answer.

Chapter 14

1. Why does Emily think differently about protesting the war after January 15?
2. Why does Emily break up with Scott? Do you believe it's possible for two people with opposing political views to be in a relationship? Draw from your personal experience.

Chapter 15

1. What is the impact of the Big Freeze and the Persian Gulf War on Emily's life? Is it possible to see good outcomes in a negative situation? Share some examples from your personal experience.
2. Why doesn't Connell tell Emily's parents the real reason for visiting Stanford University and the University of California? Is a teacher ever justified in misleading a student's parents?
3. Discuss Connell's view of the American Civil War. Does a pacifist ever believe war is necessary?
4. What has the color yellow come to symbolize to Connell and what does it symbolize to Emily? Why does Emily think of the Wordsworth poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"? Does the color yellow symbolize anything to you?

Chapter 16

1. Why does the school board ask Connell to resign? What does Connell want Emily to do to help her keep her job? Do you think Emily could have prevented Connell from being fired?

2. What does Carlos think about Connell as a teacher? Has a demanding teacher ever inspired you to do better in a class?
3. Why did Emily wait so long to apologize to Lindsay? Do you think their friendship can be the same as it was before the accident? Must a friendship change as friends mature? Are longtime friends always closer than newer friends? Share personal experiences in your discussion.
4. Why doesn't Emily say good-bye to Connell?
5. How does Scott's behavior at the memorial service in Mooney Grove affect Emily?
6. Why does Gary stay at the memorial service after Scott leaves?

Chapter 17

1. What does Emily's mother mean when she says, "I have a Dr. McKenzie, only her name is Mrs. Silverthorne"?

Chapter 18

2. Why does Emily want to return to the cheerleading team?
3. Do you think Emily should write Connell back? Is it important to the story if she does or does not?
4. What does Emily mean when she says, "A person, Dr. Connell McKenzie, happened to me"? Do you have someone like Connell McKenzie in your consciousness? If you do, explain why this person is important to you.
5. Have you ever protested a war or fought for a cause? What were your actions? Do you think you made a difference?