

The Little Liar by Mitch Albom

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Little Liar

Beloved bestselling author Mitch Albom returns with a powerful novel that moves from a coastal Greek city during the Holocaust, to America, where the intertwined lives of three survivors are forever changed by the perils of deception and the grace of redemption.

Eleven-year-old Nico Krispis never told a lie. When the Nazi's invade his home in Salonika, Greece, the trustworthy boy is discovered by a German officer, who offers him a chance to save his family. All Nico has to do is convince his fellow Jewish residents to board trains heading to "new homes" where they are promised jobs and safety. Unaware that this is all a cruel ruse, the innocent boy goes to the station platform every day and reassures the passengers that the journey is safe. But when the final train is at the station, Nico sees his family being loaded into a large boxcar crowded with other neighbors. Only after it is too late does Nico discover that he helped send the people he loved--and all the others--to their doom at Auschwitz.

Nico never tells the truth again.

In *The Little Liar*, his first novel set during the Holocaust, Mitch Albom interweaves the stories of Nico, his brother Sebastian, and their schoolmate Fanni, who miraculously survive the death camps and spend years searching for Nico, who has become a pathological liar, and the Nazi officer who radically changed their lives. As the decades pass, Albom reveals the consequences of what they said, did, and endured.

A moving parable that explores honesty, survival, revenge and devotion, *The Little Liar* is Mitch Albom at his very best. Narrated by the voice of Truth itself, it is a timeless story about the harm we inflict with our deceptions, and the power of love to ultimately redeem us.

The following list of questions about this book are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this novel. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach this book.

1. In what ways are truth and honesty important to living well?
2. What is truth? How do we recognize it?
3. Why does Nico, as a boy, always tell the truth? How does this make him powerful? In what ways does this also make him vulnerable?
4. What is Sebastian like? What does he seem to know about the world that Nico does not?
5. What drives Udo Graf? What might explain his horrible need and ability to be so cruel and murderous? How does he justify and even feel proud of such evil behavior in himself?
6. Despite seeming to value honesty and the truth, why do people often “disregard the parts that displease”? What’s being avoided?
7. What does it mean that, “if you want to get away with lying, first change the language”? What are some examples of language being manipulated in order to deceive? What is the antidote to such linguistic deception?
8. What might be the ethical or moral difference between withholding information, offering partial truths, and outright lying?
9. In what situations might lying be justified, necessary, or even good? How might one decide if a lie is good?
10. How do the various powerful relationship dynamics between Nico, Sebastian, and Fannie influence what happens in the story?
11. What does it mean that “children are still children,” that “even under the most dire circumstances, they will create moments to be exactly their age”? How is this related to an ability to be truthful?
12. What is the White Tower? What lesson does Lazarre try to teach the children by telling them the story about it?
13. What was important and powerful about the city of Salonika? What, beyond the tragic loss of life, was lost in the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis? What of enduring value remained or reemerged?
14. Why is it that even being honest with oneself can be particularly challenging? Why is it important to do so? What are some strategies to help?
15. How did Nico’s constant deceit serve him? How did it harm him throughout his life? Why did Nico become a pathological liar even when he was out of danger?
16. What is fascinating and compelling about liars—conmen, frauds, impersonators—in literature and films?

17. What might it mean that “nothing cements a lie more than guilt”?
18. Why is the need to be accepted so powerful in people? How does this affect the ability to be honest or not with oneself?
19. What might it mean that sometimes, “the truths we don’t speak...echo the loudest”?
20. When might silence be necessary, or even be “a kindness,” for people?
21. What are the dangers—emotionally, politically, culturally—of silence?
22. What might explain the fact that so many people said or did nothing in the face of the horrors of the Nazi campaign?
23. What motivated Gizella to be of such profound help to Fannie and Katalin Karady to save twenty-three children, despite the great risk of their own lives?
24. Katalin Karady says to Nico, “these days, everyone is whoever they need to be.” What are the effects of having to lie about one’s true identity?
25. How are fictional stories—fairytales, parables, even Nico’s powerful films—different from lies or not? In what ways might fictional stories be helpful or harmful? How might it be that, as Pablo Picasso said, “Art is a lie that makes us realize truth”?
26. What is the “raw truth”? What might be its limitations?
27. What might it mean that “in desperate moments people hear what they want to hear, despite what they might see right in front of them”? What are some examples of this in the novel? How might a person stay dedicated to the truth in such moments?
28. Lazarre teaches the children about *chesed shel emet*, a true and loving kindness. What is this? Why is it so powerful and important?
29. What does it mean that “harmony and humankind make a short marriage”?
30. Throughout the novel, resistance to evil and oppression is powerfully important. What are some of the many forms that resistance takes?
31. Udo Graf believes that even great evil like that perpetrated by the Nazis can and will happen again because, “*Time passes. People forget.*” What are important ways to prevent this from happening?
32. How does complicity in people and governments complicate the essential task of telling the truth, of defining responsibility and accountability for the destructions of war?

33. Why can't Nico open up about the truth of his experience, even to Fannie? What would it mean for him to do so? How does he suffer because of it?
 34. What does it mean that "killing the spirit is a challenge"? What is this great power within each person? Where do we see it in action throughout the novel? How can it be accessed in life?
 35. What is necessary in the complex process of personal, social, and cultural healing from such profound acts of horror as those committed by the Nazis and their allies? How did Nico, Sebastian, and Fannie each attempt to go about surviving? To what extent was each able to heal or not?
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