

The Lovely Bones **By Alice Sebold**

Description:

The Lovely Bones is told from the perspective of fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon, as she looks down at her family from heaven following her rape and murder. While Susie and readers see the tremendous grief and longing that her family, and she, experiences, we also see a story about love, healing, and hope.

Discussion questions:

- Coping after a crisis. People use many different ways to cope after a trauma: exercise, eating, keeping busy, talking to others, using drugs or alcohol, etc. What ways of coping did the different characters use? What are your main coping strategies? How can you encourage yourself and others to make healthy choices?
- Family members and friends of victims have many feelings to deal with: grief, guilt, loneliness, sadness. What are some ways that the characters show these kinds of feelings?
- Assailants target vulnerable people (children, women, elderly, disabled) to decrease the odds of getting caught. In fact, 75 percent of all survivors of sexual assault know their attackers and 93 percent of juvenile sexual assault survivors know their attackers. Why do you think rapists choose to attack people they know? Why do you think Mr. Harvey chose Susie?
- Susie is not the first girl Mr. Harvey had raped or killed. He describes his first rape on p. 292 as the “muffled rape of a school friend.” She switched schools shortly after and he never saw her again. Why do you think this girl didn’t report his crime to the police?
- Why does the author include details about Mr. Harvey’s childhood and his memories of his mother? By giving him a human side, does Sebold get us closer to understanding his actions? Sebold explained in an interview about the novel that murderers “are not animals but men,” and that is what makes them so frightening. What do you think?
- Often, survivors/victims of sexual assault bear the blame for being attacked because it helps others of us to believe that by avoiding doing what the victim did,

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we can avoid being attacked ourselves. Can you remember a time when you were vulnerable? Maybe when you were sick, or tired, or sad, or desperate, or lonely. Is it possible to completely avoid vulnerability, or is this something that makes us human? Watching her community on the one-year anniversary of her death (p. 206) Susie says, “What had happened to me could happen to anyone.” Do you agree?

- Alice Sebold’s book is also about how out of tragedy often comes healing. Susie’s family separates and comes back together and community members learn to find strength in each other. Do you think that good can also come of trauma?

