

Better with Friends (The Kaleidoscope Girls Book 1)

A Reading Guide

(SPOILER ALERT)

- 1) *Importance of friends during different stages in our lives*
 - a) The author believes our friendships grow in importance as we age. Do you agree?
 - b) There are some special qualities to friendships that span a lifetime. When we form friendships as young kids or teenagers, our friends often get to know our families, too. They understand where we come from. We learn the value of respecting people's secrets. What are some other benefits of a long friendship?
 - c) We all have people in our past that we are happy to leave there—in the past. Life brings growth, and we naturally outgrow some people. Not everyone makes a good lifelong friend. Do you agree?
- 2) How much impact do you believe “place” has on molding young people? The Kaleidoscope Girls spent their formative years in a small midwestern town where parents knew and supported each other. Some of them still have family living there, pulling them back from time to time in their adult lives. If you've moved away from the place you called home when you were a child, how do you feel when (if) you return now?
- 3) It was fun for the author to imagine how a twelve-year-old girl would feel at a rustic summer camp, away from family and everyday life. How terrifying would it feel to get your first period away from home? Would the fear be heightened because something as common and human as menstruation often feels like a taboo topic? Could you feel Jackie's misery when she realized what was happening? Do you think the way Kit handled the situation, despite how antagonist Jackie was to her at first, helped cement their growing friendship?
- 4) We are all told myths as children. Some stem from family history, religion, even local lore. The myth of Diamond Falls, passed on to the young campers by Wendy, their camp counselor, was fun for the author to craft. Will the Kaleidoscope Girls ever find genuine diamonds in the water near their old campground, or will life teach them that diamonds aren't really a girl's best friend after all? Do you have any myths unique to your childhood that have stayed with you?
- 5) What are some of your favorite high school memories? If you went to prom, was it an anxiety-inducing experience? Jackie and her friends prom experience predated the more recent trend of fancy “promposals”. Would you agree the pressures on today's kids are even higher than they were back then?
- 6) Jackie spent most of her life trying to live up to her father's expectations. She wanted to fill the void created by the rift between her dad and her only brother. How do you think that impacted Jackie's relationship with her father? With her mother? With her brother, even?
- 7) The rift between Jackie's father and brother had a tremendous impact on their family structure. Do you think her father regrets the way things played out? Thirty years later, he is a very sick man living under the shadow of a terrible diagnosis. Do you think it would be worth it for father and son to try to re-establish some kind of relationship now, or is it too late?

- 8) The Kaleidoscope Girls are nearly fifty years old. What new challenges will they likely face with their aging parents? Some have empty nests at home, but are their caregiving days over?
- 9) Jackie is sure that her age is impacting her ability to succeed in her corporate career. Instead of tolerating the ageism, she takes drastic measures in the hopes of building something more rewarding. Have you experienced ageism? Do you think it is a significant problem in our society today? What can we do to fight it?

10) *Reconnecting with old friends*

- a) Life commitments can make it difficult to stay in touch with friends. If you think it's worth the effort, what things have you found that work well to keep friendships strong in a hyper-connected world that can sometimes lack depth in relationships?
- b) Do you think the youth of today are forming as deep of connections with their friends as people did before things like technology, personal safety, uber-competitive sports (talent levels, financial and time commitments required to even participate), and even isolating events like the pandemic impact the amount and quality of the time kids spend together?

11) *Fun traveling with friends*

- a) Would you like to commit to an annual trip with old friends, like the Kaleidoscope Girls do in **Better with Friends**? If you've traveled with friends, either on a short weekend getaway or something more extensive, what are some of your favorite memories?
- b) How important is the destination when you travel with friends? Some people love to keep busy while traveling, seeing as many sights and experiencing as much of the local flavor as possible. Others prefer plenty of rest and relaxation, talking with your fellow travelers. What's your style?
- c) If you could travel anywhere in the world with any friends from your past, where would you go and who would you want beside you?

12) *Symbolism played a big part in this story*

- a) The metamorphosis of caterpillars into butterflies mirrored the changes the girls would go through, starting at that first summer camp and all the way through to the current day. A butterfly intrigues Jackie as she learns she didn't get the promotion she'd counted on. Kit will even build a career around butterflies. Do you agree that life is one long metamorphosis?
- b) Artists can transform broken pieces of glass into something beautiful in a kaleidoscope. In what ways has life broken the Kaleidoscope Girls, and what have they done to build back something beautiful? Would you agree that changing the way we look at something can result in something beautiful, much like the shifting patterns we see when we twist a kaleidoscope?

- 13) What does the title "**Better with Friends**" mean to you? Do you agree friends can make our lives better? Has reading this book spurred you to reach out to anyone in your past to rekindle a dormant friendship?