

Discussion Guide: *The Coldest Winter I Ever Spent*

1. Why do you think Del is so close to Aunt Fran? How does their relationship shift over the course of the story?
2. What healthy coping strategies does Del use to deal with her depression and anxiety throughout the book? How do these differ from her unhealthy coping mechanisms of abusing alcohol and drugs?
3. What are some of the positive impacts of Del's work at the crisis line? What are some of its limitations?
4. For much of the story, Del experiences negative self-talk in the form of a contemptuous inner voice. This voice puts the worst possible spin on everything Del does. What are some examples of this voice lying to Del about herself?
5. How are the challenges that Nick faces with his deteriorating eyesight similar to and different from Del's mental health struggles?
6. What distinction does Del eventually make between her suicide attempt and the choice Fran wants to make to end her life? What about Osgood's suicide? How are the circumstances fundamentally different for each of these cases?
7. While Del isn't religious, she does come to feel that "death is holy." What convinces her of this? How is death's sacredness connected to her determination to cherish life?
8. What sources of support does Del have even after Aunt Fran dies? What sources of support do you have when life is especially hard? In what ways might you be able to offer support to others who are struggling?