

## *SEEING EYE GIRL: A MEMOIR OF MADNESS, RESILIENCE, AND HOPE*

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### **BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE**

*Seeing Eye Girl: A Memoir of Madness, Resilience, and Hope* is one girl's story of growing up in a violent, abusive, and dysfunctional home with a blind, artistic mother who suffered a psychological break when the narrator, Beverly, was five years old. From that point on, life with Momma changed from a "fairy-tale childhood" to one of chaos, fear, and trauma.

This memoir is a deep-dive into a case study of childhood trauma, adults living with untreated trauma, resilience, hope, and the important role of trusted adult mentors, especially teachers, in the lives of vulnerable children. In this memoir, it is Beverly's teachers who encourage her, instill the love of learning, and empower her to be strong, capable, and eventually, independent.

The following questions are offered as suggestions of the kinds of things a reader or a Book Club may want to reflect on after reading *Seeing Eye Girl*. Of course, you will have many of your own reflections and questions you may want to present to your book club colleagues. Do not feel limited by these suggestions:

1. *Seeing Eye Girl* opens when Beverly, 15, is focused on school and Momma is focused on Communists, chinchillas, and radiation. What clues does the first chapter offer about the personalities/values/beliefs /needs of the two main characters? In what ways are you drawn to Momma and Beverly? What is the central conflict/dilemma of this story? Where do you think the story is going?
2. Beverly describes her first five years as a “fairy tale.” Why does she think this? What do you think?
3. After the big fight, Momma takes Beverly and Sharon to Warsaw, NY to stay with relatives. When the girls are finally reunited with Momma and Ron Radzai after a year and a half, Beverly has no recollection of her time in Warsaw. What do you think happened to Beverly’s memory? What do you think happened in Momma’s life during the year and a half of separation? What happened to the girls’ father? What happened to Ron Radzai?
4. Once in Miami, Beverly is faced with many new realities. She’s bewildered and feels a deep sense of loss. What has she lost? How might you have handled this situation? What’s Beverly’s attitude toward her new step-father, her living conditions? Her mother?
5. Why do you think Beverly likes school so much? Why does she call her teachers “angel teachers?” How do the teachers influence Beverly? Do you think the angel teachers ever suspected something was wrong at Beverly’s home?
6. Momma and Beverly have a special relationship based on Momma’s blindness. Describe this relationship. In many abusive relationships, the abuser and the abused are intricately co-dependent in such a way that the abused feels responsible for the abuser and feels guilt and shame about the abuse. How do you see the relationship here between mother and child?

7. By 1950, Momma has her sight restored by a new medical procedure, the corneal transplant. How did having her sight change Momma? How did Beverly react to her mother's surgery?
8. Momma's miracle surgery and her interesting human interest story thrust her and the family into the national spotlight. Discuss the whirlwind life Momma enjoyed during this time period. The *This is Your Life* experience seemed to unsettle Beverly. What do you think was going on in her mind? The Famous Artists School proclaims Momma will be the next great commercial artist, if she works at it. How does this possibility influence Momma and change the family?
9. When the family moves from Lodi to Passaic, Momma "changes" the last names of both Sharon and Beverly. How would you feel if this happened to you? How did the girls feel about this? What do you think was Momma's intent?
10. By the time Beverly was in high school, Momma starts to bring men into the house most evenings. Talk about what happens to Beverly during this time of life. What effects do you think these events had on her?
11. At the same time men were in the apartment at night, Beverly starts stealing pastries and sharing these with Sharon. Talk about this and the subsequent eating disorders that arose from this behavior. What factors in Beverly's life influenced the eating issues? How did her eating issues affect Beverly's social and emotional life?
12. Beverly and Sharon are reunited with their father during their last years in college and high school. Talk about the complex relationships that evolve. What do you think Beverly wanted out of her relationship with her father? What did he want?
13. How did Beverly manage to go to college? Why did she major in education? What can you tell about the kind of teacher she was?

14. Beverly “fell in love” with the first boy she ever dated. How would you describe their relationship? How do you think she handled the break up?
15. About three weeks after Beverly and Sharon graduated—from college and high school—Ron Radzai walks out. He’d been with Alett for 17 years. Why do you think he left her? Why did he leave when he did? How do you feel about Ron Radzai?
16. In 1963, Beverly needs a car to get to her first teaching job—and to take care of the family. She asks her father to help her. How does that go? She also has to navigate the system that required a man’s endorsement to obtain a loan and to purchase an automobile. How does Beverly deal with her father and the system?
17. During Beverly’s first year of teaching, the cumulative weight of seventeen years of physical and emotional trauma presses heavily on her, and she contemplates suicide. Not only thinks about it, but has a plan. Feeling alone and in need of support, she seeks help from her minister. Talk about their meeting and how the minister, his wife, and Beverly handle the interactions. What do you think about how Beverly felt after the meeting?
18. In the last chapter, Beverly faces a dark night of the soul as she struggles with her choices: drive into the river or stay at home and continue to work on being strong. In her mind, she argues with herself about the pros and cons of each choice. Who is also part of this discussion? What conclusion does she reach and how did she get there?
19. Once Beverly makes a decision, she makes a plan. Talk about the plan. Why do you think she made these plans?
20. Epilogue. The epilogue takes us twenty years into the future after the big decision Beverly made to leave home. Summarize what’s happened during these twenty years. What are the major takeaways of this memoir? What relevance does this book have to modern day issues? What emotions did you experience as you read the book? Would you recommend the book to others?