



Bloom

By Kelle Hampton
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Questions for Discussion

1. What does "Bloom" represent and why do you think it's the title of the book? What do you think it means to Kelle?
2. Before Nella was born, Kelle read a book called *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years* by Donald Miller, which she says helped prepare her for the coming challenges. The book presents the idea that hard times shape us into interesting developed characters and that an easy life of comfort does nothing to make us grow. Do you think it is possible to grow and learn the same sorts of lessons Kelle learned through hardship (including the challenges in her childhood) without going through difficult times? Is it possible to learn these lessons through books or through the experiences of others, even if our own

problems seem to pale in comparison?

3. How have past hardships helped shape you into who you are today? Are you less afraid of hard times because of these experiences? If you feel you've been spared significant hardships, are you afraid of going through them in the future? Have your opinions about hardship changed after reading *Bloom*? In what ways?

4. Kelle's past experiences with "Church" greatly affected her view of God and religion, yet she clearly believes in God, evident from her statement in Chapter 2: "People seek comfort in rules and find security in establishments, but through every pain and joy in my life, I have drawn closer to the grander amazement that God is big and accessible and, like any parent who loves a child, he wants us to find joy and good in life." Why do you think Kelle chooses to capitalize "Church"? What role does God play in her acceptance of her new life with Nella? Do you think her past experiences with religion affected the way she accepted Nella? Do you think Nella's diagnosis changes her faith?

5. One of the first things Kelle does after receiving Nella's diagnosis is ask her father to pray. As she writes in the prologue, "Dad prayed and thanked God for giving us Nella and thanked him for the wonderful things he had planned for us. For our family. For Nella. Amen." What significance do you think prayer has had in Kelle's life? Prayer, at least defined by a verbal "Dear God," is something many people only turn to during hardship. Do you agree? Do you think that's necessarily a negative thing? Regardless of what religion you practice, how else can prayer be defined and in what ways do you pray? What value does prayer, or turning to the comfort of a higher power, have during hardship?

6. Do you feel Kelle would have responded the same way toward Nella's diagnosis had Nella been her first baby? How did her first birth, and more specifically Lainey, equip Kelle for Nella's entrance into her world?

7. What broadened Kelle's perception of perfection? How would you say it is different today than it was before Nella was born? What is your own definition of perfection and what in your life has shaped that definition?

8. What effect do the book's photographs have on the larger story? Kelle talks about the role of creativity/writing and photography, in particular in her healing process. Talk about how creativity influences your life.

9. The theme of friendship is portrayed strongly through the events in *Bloom* as Kelle leans on her friends, or "the Net." In what ways did her friends support her differently than her family? How do women support each other differently than men (husbands) do? Are there events in your life where you have experienced these different forms of support?

10. Brett and Kelle handle Nella's diagnosis in very distinct ways: Kelle, outwardly expressive, and Brett, quietly and internally. Do you think this is generally true of how men and women handle hardship? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each? Who do you relate to more in how you deal with hardship and what can you learn from the other?

11. When one thinks of hardship, one thinks of loss—the loss of a loved one, job, marriage, health, and with that, a dream. Along with loss, which is painful enough, comes the opinions of others, albeit real or supposed. *What will people think if I have to foreclose on my home? What will people think if my child drools in public? What will people think if I get divorced? What will people think if I lose my hair?* If you've endured hardships, how have you been affected by the opinions of others? Do you find yourself caring less now about what people think? How did you deal with the comments, stares, and uncomfortable situations? If you've been spared hardship, how much does the view of society play a part in your fears?

12. It is obvious from the story that Kelle has an incredible support system of family and friends. Do you think the way she embraced Nella would have been different if she did not have a supportive family or a network of loving friends? If so, how?

13. Kelle questions her own selfishness in the book and describes how she felt bad that it took having a child with Down syndrome to open her eyes and make her more compassionate. As she says in Chapter 13, "We're all in some way selfish beings, and the good of the world depends on that fact—that someone, somewhere will wonder what it might feel like to be in someone else's shoes, to feel their pain and, in doing so, attempt to do something about it. Our selfishness is ultimately what transforms us to be altruistic." Do you agree? How have your personal experiences transformed you to be more compassionate and better understand the needs of others? How can we challenge more people to be altruistic without having a personal connection to a cause?

14. While life with a special needs child presents obvious challenges, many parents find that their fears were actually worse than the reality. Whether or not you have a child with special needs, have you found this to be true that the fear of hardship is worse than the hardship itself? Why do you think people feel this way and what changes our perceptions?

15. The phrase "we're more alike than different" rings true in this story when comparing typical individuals to individuals with Down syndrome. How else can this statement be applied in society today?