



Gossip

By Beth Gutcheon
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Questions for Discussion

1. Three women are at the heart of *Gossip*: Lovie, Dinah, and Avis. Compare and contrast each of their personalities. Why don't Dinah and Avis like each other? What draws both of them to Lovie?
2. What kind of people are these women? Do you have a favorite? Would you be friends with any or all of them? Though Lovie has a circle of friends, would you say she's lonely?
3. "Did you know that the origin of the word gossip in English is 'god-sibling'? It's the talk between people who are godparents to the same child, people who have a legitimate loving interest in the person they talk about. It's talk that weaves a net of support and connection beneath the people you want to protect," Lovie tells us early in the novel. Were you surprised to read this? How do you define gossip? Why do so many people like to talk about someone else? Do you gossip? Is there a difference between "discussing" someone and "gossiping" about them?

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4. Lovie knows a great deal about the wealthy customers who patronize her dress shop, knowledge that could alter various lives. Why do these women speak freely around her? Does she do the right thing by remaining "above" what she hears? At one point, when she discovers that Dinah's husband is having an affair, she asks you, the reader, "what would you do?" How do you answer her? Lovie explains her behavior: "There was no right answer. No one is thanked for bearing news like that." Do you agree with her?
5. Talk about Lovie's relationship with Gil. Was she right to stay with him? If she had it to do again, do you think she would? Did he ultimately treat her the way she deserved?
6. Think about Lovie. Is she too concerned with manners and appearances and the idea of privacy? How do her views shape her and the events that unfold? How might things have been different if she shared the knowledge she acquired often through no fault or effort of her own with those involved? When she hears people talk about her friends sharing information that is both damaging and wrong, why doesn't Lovie speak up?
7. Dinah and Avis's respective children, Nicky and Grace, fall in love. How does this affect the dynamic between Dinah and Avis? How does Lovie fit into the equation? How does that dynamic shift again when Nicky and Grace have a baby and then, in Nicky's final actions?
8. Were Dinah and Avis good mothers? How much did their personalities and their own relationships with their children affect Grace and Nicky and the choices they made?
9. Lovie says, "We all want either to belong somewhere, or for others to think we do." How much of our behavior is caused by our wanting to be liked, or wanting to belong? Do mean people know they are mean? How does one fight back against gratuitous unkindness?
10. Why is the book titled *Gossip*? What message is the author trying to convey? Have you had a bad experience either spreading gossip or being the subject of talk? What impact did it have on you?