

Kat Martin / The Christmas Clock: Discussion Questions

1. Sylvia Winters returns to Dreyerville, Michigan, eight years after surviving cervical cancer and leaving her fiancé. She had only visited the small town once when her alcoholic mother died. Why do you think Sylvia returned home? What did the small town offer her? Would you have returned? What does “home” mean to you?
2. Abandoned, broken-hearted and confused, Joe Dixon drops out of college and begins drinking heavily when Sylvia Winters leaves. After serving time in prison, he returns to Dreyerville to help run a business. How did prison affect Joe and his life? Discuss a time when you made an impulsive decision that impacted your life.
3. The story opens and closes with an adult Teddy Sparks Dixon recalling the series of events that led him to his family. What significant events in your life have helped you reach a goal, achieve a dream or influence your life’s path?
4. Doris Culver believes that “love . . . was for fools and dreamers, and she never allowed herself to succumb to its lure again.” She and her husband, Floyd, live barren lives, emotionally and physically. They each find joy in their own hobbies, but not with each other. Why did this happen with Doris and Floyd? Why does this happen to real-life couples? Doris and Floyd managed to find each other again. What does it take to rekindle love?
5. Lottie Sparks keeps her diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease from her friends and Teddy. Sylvia Winters kept her diagnosis of cervical cancer from Joe. Why was keeping medical secrets from loved ones a theme in the book? If you have had a serious medical situation, when did you tell your family and friends? Looking back, would you have handled the situation differently?
6. Lottie Sparks’ Alzheimer’s disease impacts many characters and circumstances in the book. According to the Mayo Clinic, about 5 percent of people between the ages of 65 and 74 have Alzheimer’s disease, while nearly half the people over the age of 85 have Alzheimer’s. As our society ages, more families will have to cope with the debilitating disease. What would you do if you recognized possible symptoms in a neighbor or relative? How would you help care for a family member struck with the disease? How would you want to be cared for if you developed the disease?
7. When Joe sees Syl at the grocery store, he’s both angry with her and still attracted to her. How would you feel about seeing a long-lost love who bitterly hurt you? How would you respond to that person?
8. Syl eventually goes to Joe’s apartment to tell him the truth about why she left. Would you have? Why or why not? Joe initially feels even more betrayed that Syl hadn’t trusted him enough to tell him about the cancer at the time. Would you have been able to forgive a partner who lied to protect you? Would you be able to allow yourself to fall in love with someone who’d betrayed you? What would it take to reconcile?

9. All the characters in *The Christmas Clock* suffered the loss of significant relationships—Syl lost her mother and Joe, Teddy lost his parents and his grandmother, Joe lost Syl, Lottie lost her daughter and Teddy, and the Culvers lost their love for each other. How did these losses impact the characters and their stories? How has losing a parent, child, partner or other close relationship affected you and your life?

10. In the end, broken relationships are healed and dreams are fulfilled. What relationships have been healed in your life? Which ones still need healing? Elmira Meeks surprises everyone by supporting Joe. Who has surprised you in your life with caring, kindness or support? How have relationships—whether close or casual—helped you fulfill your personal dreams?