

Discussion Questions for *There's A Word for That*

Do you think Marty is to blame for what happened to Janine or was he just trying to protect her? She feels that he didn't hold her to a high enough standard and so she accomplished nothing with her life. Is unconditional love a good thing? In what ways do parents damage their children by loving them too much? Did you think that Janine being supported by her father made her unsympathetic?

Many of the characters undergo transformations in the novel, none so obviously as Hailey. The fleeting nature of both beauty and fame are important themes in *There's A Word For That*. In what ways does Hailey's physical transformation speak to the larger ideas in the novel?

What did you make of Janine's relationship with Amanda? Which of the girls' narratives felt more authentic? Did you feel sympathy for Amanda's version of their history—or with Janine's? In what ways do we all cling to our own stories, never really bothering to see the past from our siblings' perspective?

There's A Word For That is told from multiple points of view. How does this technique influence where your sympathies lie when reading the novel? Which character do you think is the novel's main protagonist? Why?

Is Marty's drug use understandable, relatable? Given the current opioid epidemic, were you surprised that someone as old and successful as Marty would be addicted to drugs?

The novel deals with different ideas of womanhood at different stages of life. Strong, independent women (Bunny), misguided women who rely on men (Pamela and Janine), confused women who feel victimized (Amanda) and girls trying to figure it all out (Hailey). Which character did you relate to most and why?

This book is very much about ageing and the fall from grace, both public and private. What do you think Janine means by the following: "There was nothing like visiting her father in rehab to illuminate how far he'd fallen in the world. Every stint in rehab, Janine knew, confirmed Marty's fear that he was no longer essential, that in getting old, he'd become useless."

Did you find Janine's attitude towards her mother's suicide disturbing? Was her insouciance a defense mechanism or a true remove? How do you think Pamela's suicide affected the family? In what ways might their lives have been different had she failed in her attempt?

Narcissistic parents run amuck in the novel. Is Henry's attitude towards Bunny at the beginning of the book justified? Does he have a right to be angry with her?

In what ways did the book make you think about celebrity? Tanen seems less interested in the high of fame than in its lingering side-effects. Do you think it's possible to live a "normal" life in the spotlight? Can you think of anyone who has aged out of celebrity with grace?

What was your favorite German word and why? Do you know any other foreign words that capture something that cannot be defined in English?