

Reading Group Guide for
The Words between Us
by Erin Bartels

(Spoiler alert—these questions assume you’ve already read the book)

1. Robin spends much of her life running away from any association with her parents because of their crimes, making up a new name, a new history, a new identity. But she doesn’t always (ever?) truly control that identity. She can’t control what others say or think about her. When have you felt out of control of your own narrative? What did you do to try to write your own story? How have you failed? How have you succeeded?
2. How would you characterize Robin? Brave? Impetuous? Naive? Strong? Does your impression of her character change as she ages? How do you see her growing through her trials?
3. Robin’s friend Sarah clearly has a drinking problem, and rumors abound about her cavalier relationships with men. Have you ever had a self-destructive friend? What did you do to help? What do you wish you’d done? Or perhaps you have been that self-destructive friend. If so, how did your friends and family help you? How did they hurt you despite their good intentions?
4. As Robin and Peter share books, they grow closer to one another. What have you shared with a friend that brought meaning to your relationship? Movies? Music? Secrets?
5. How did you feel when Robin left Peter and Sussex behind? Do you think she was overreacting? What would you have done in her situation?
6. Robin spends a lot of time and energy trying to avoid her problems. How do you think her life may have been different if she had just faced them head-on?
7. Robin’s friend and employee Dawt Pi has a strong faith that helps her through the difficulties of being away from her family in a strange new country. How does faith play a part in your life and struggles? Is it a source of comfort? Do you have a friend like Dawt Pi whose faith you lean on when yours falters?
8. A lot of Robin’s problems can be traced to misinterpreted words, whether they were things she’d heard or things she’d read (or read into, in the case of Mrs. Flynt’s notes in the books). When have you been misunderstood by a loved one or a dear friend? How did you make it right?
9. Books are central to *The Words between Us*. What three books do you think most shaped you as you were growing up? What are some of your favorite books right now?