

Discussion Questions

The Missing Treasures of Amy Ashton by Eleanor Ray

1. Consider the title of Ray's novel, *The Missing Treasures of Amy Ashton*. Which treasures of Amy's are missing? Does she find them by the novel's end? How do you interpret the title within the scheme of the novel?
2. Many of the items from Amy's past show up in her present: dark-green wine bottles, mugs, honeysuckle, ashtrays, lighters, and birds are just a few. Why do you think these particular items become so significant to Amy after Tim and Chantel's disappearance? What about some of the more seemingly random items, like clocks, mirrors, and cookbooks? What might they represent?
3. Although it is never explicitly stated in the novel, Amy copes with the loss of Tim and Chantel by hoarding. Even though hoarding is a relatively common disorder, it's a taboo subject that's not often discussed within the public sphere. Why do you think this is? What are other common forms of grief and coping? Is there ever a right or wrong way to grieve? Why do you think some forms of mourning are socially acceptable, while others are not?
4. Amy often assigns her treasures human characteristics or traits—in fact, her emotional attachment to her “aviary” is so strong that Richard believes she keeps real birds. But smaller items are personified as well. An empty wine bottle is “forlorn,” while empty glasses are “sad” (p. 3); a broken mug is “scared” (p. 26); and she fears the pots in her backyard are “starved of attention, of sunlight, of the plants that should have made them complete” (p. 33). Why do you think Amy attaches these very human emotions to the items she rescues?
5. Color plays a major theme in this book, from the descriptions of Amy's treasures to her wardrobe. “She used to enjoy wearing beautiful colors. The yellow of spring daffodils, purples reminiscent of the evening sky, the blues of a hazy morning. . . . She had never liked black, perhaps that's why she started wearing it when [Tim and Chantel] had gone. Joy seemed wrong” (p. 136). Consider the evolution of color throughout *The Missing Treasures of Amy Ashton*. Why do you think Amy chose to forgo color for so long? What does her slow incorporation of color back into her clothing indicate?
6. Charles and Daniel are both fascinated by Amy, but Charles is especially determined to make her his friend. Why do you think he is so drawn to Amy? What is similar about their collections and their passions for their objects? How does he help her throughout the novel?

7. When Amy is getting ready to recycle her bottles for the first time, she reflects on their second life. “Broken down and remade. Reborn. Just because they didn’t stay in their current form didn’t mean that they wouldn’t be happy” (p. 163). What might this quote represent within the context of the novel? Do you think Amy empathizes with the bottles here? Why is this such an important moment for her?
8. Amy is often surprised by the kindness of the people around her, and forms several unlikely friendships and alliances throughout the novel. Discuss her initial perceptions and later relationships with Richard, Rachel, and Carthika. Which friendship surprised you the most? Share a story about an unlikely friendship or a surprising relationship you’ve had in your own life. What was something you learned from that experience?
9. Grief is a major theme in this novel, and almost all of the characters—including the more unlikable ones—have private struggles. Why do you think Eleanor Ray chose for all the characters to reveal some of their personal difficulties? Consider the more unlikable characters, like Rachel, Liam, and Nina. Did you view them differently after you learned what they’d experienced or what they regretted?
10. Were you surprised when you finally found out what happened to Chantel and Tim? Why or why not? Did your suspicions change throughout the course of the novel?
11. Chantel’s visit is a huge shock. Why do you think she waited so long to contact Amy? Do you think Amy’s future would have been any different if Chantel had decided not to come back? How would you have reacted to her visit if you were in Amy’s shoes?
12. Who or what has Scarlett, Amy’s favorite china bird, represented throughout the novel? Why do you think Amy chooses to cremate her with Tim?
13. By the end of the novel, Amy realizes “She had to let go of the broken things in her life. . . She needed to make room for people” (p. 302–4). Throughout the book, Amy’s love of her treasures slowly shifts to the people in her life. At what point does Amy begin to question her current way of living and decide to let more people in? Is there an inciting incident that kicks off this change, or a series of moments that you felt were significant? Who or what has the biggest impact on Amy? Why?

Questions from publisher’s website

