

Pandemic by Yvonne Ventresca
Whole Book Discussion Questions

In Pandemic, only a few people know what caused Lilianna Snyder's sudden change from a model student to a withdrawn pessimist who worries about all kinds of disasters. After her parents are called away on business, Lil's town is hit by what soon becomes a widespread fatal illness. With her worst fears realized, Lil must find a way to survive not only the outbreak and its real-life consequences, but also her own personal demons.

This guide aligns with Common Core Standards
ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10 1, 2, 3, 9, 10 and ELA-Literacy.WI.9-10 1

1. Analyze the different ways characters besides Lil respond to crisis in the book. Select specific characters and support their responses with examples from the text. How is their reaction to the pandemic different or similar to Lil's?
2. Megs teases Lil that she is a pessimist. Where do we see examples of her being a pessimist? Where do we see examples of her being an optimist? Which do you think she truly is? Explain your view with specific examples from the text.
3. The author William Golding has often commented that man has the capacity for evil when placed in the right situation, "Look out," he said, "the evil is in us all." Do you believe this is true? Why or why not? Where do we see examples of this in *Pandemic*?
4. When Jay, Ty, and Cam get sick, Lil has to decide between staying safe and taking a risk. She thinks, "Stalling, I weighed the choices. Security or danger?" (Chapter 24) Do you believe she made the right choice? Why or why not? Where do we see her choose security in the book? Where do we see her choose danger?
5. Research a historical contagious disease epidemic or pandemic. How did society react to the outbreak? How would society's reaction today be different or the same? What impact does technology have on communications about a contagious disease?
6. What statement is the author, Yvonne Ventresca, making about family? Explain citing specific examples from the text. How does Lil's family change throughout the novel? (Examine not just her biological family but also her surrogate family.)
7. Compare and contrast the town of Portico before and after the outbreak. Be sure to pay attention to specific details in the setting to support your response.
8. While the pandemic is the main conflict in the book, what other conflicts does Lil face? Define an alternative conflict, discuss how it shaped the book and how it was or wasn't resolved.
9. Megs and Kayla were both close friends with Lil. Compare and contrast Megs and Kayla. Evaluate each character's positive traits and faults citing specific examples from the book to support your view.

10. Lil chooses not to tell anyone but her close friends, family, and the authorities about Mr. B. Why does she make this choice? Do you think this is a realistic decision? Why or why not?
11. When Lil is watching TV, one expert talks about the antivirals that were available in limited amounts. The expert states:

“All citizens between fifteen and fifty are at risk...So, who gets it first? Pregnant women? People with preexisting conditions, like asthma? But we can’t expect the emergency system to work if those on the front lines aren’t protected. Not only doctors and nurses but EMT volunteers, police, and firefighters are expected to help the ill. With the flu so easily transmitted, is it fair to ask them to do so without some kind of protective measures?” (Chapter 26)

If you had to make the decision, who do you believe should get the antiviral? Explain your view in detail with connections to the text.
12. Near the end of the story, Lil says to her mother, “I’m emotionally stronger than when you left, Mom.” (Chapter 31) What has changed her emotionally to make her stronger? Cite specific examples from the text to support your response.
13. After Jay reveals to Lil that he knows what happened between her and Mr. B., she asks him if he feels sorry for her. He says, “No. I feel connected to you because I...I realized what it cost you to keep that secret. To be on the edge of telling, but to step back and bury it. The fear is there. Always.” (Chapter 28) What did it cost Lil to keep her secret? Evaluate both the physical and emotional costs and support your responses with reasoning from the text. What other secrets are kept in the story? Why do you think the characters choose not to share the truth?
14. As a society, do you believe we have a moral obligation to help those in need during a crisis? Why or why not? Where do you see examples of people helping in this book? Where do you see people making the choice not to help?
15. Jay says to Lil, “Well, I’m a survivor. So are you.” (Chapter 31) In what ways is Lil a survivor? Explain how Lil overcomes specific obstacles in the novel (both personal and environmental). Cite specific examples from the text to support your response.
16. Kayla doesn’t believe Lil when she first tells her about Mr. B. What motivates her actions? Do you believe they were warranted? Why or why not?
17. How does *Pandemic* mirror current events? Research what is going on in the news today (or in the near past) and then compare and contrast the fictional and the actual events.
18. Why do you think Yvonne Ventresca decided to write the book in the POV of Lil? How would the story have changed if it were written in the POV of another character? Select a different character and evaluate how his/her POV would change the novel.
19. Survival is an ever-present concern for the characters. How does this drive the action of the book? How does it affect different characters in the book?

20. When Lil is talking with Ethan about their former relationship, Ethan says, “Look, it’s hard to start over. You already know everything about me – my annoying mother, my lunatic brother. You’ve had Sunday dinner with my grandma. And I know all about you too...In crazy times like these, there’s comfort in that, don’t you think?” Lil responds, “I’m not sure you can ever know everything about a person. There’s always something left unsaid.” (Chapter 19) Pick a relationship between two characters in the story and compare what is explicitly said and what is left unsaid.
21. When the pandemic first starts, Lil wonders: “If I died next week, would my life count for anything? This was our very own *Titanic*, our history in the making. It was an opportunity for heroism and greatness and yet I was an anxious ball of nerves, crying in my dead friend’s bed.” (Chapter 18) After reading the book, how would you respond to her musings? What did her life count for? How did she make her impact? Cite specifics from the text to support your response.
22. How is the setting important in *Pandemic*? Describe the setting and explain its significance using specific examples as to how it contributes to the overall theme/message of the novel.
23. Who are the secondary characters in the novel? Select two of them and explain how each is important and what they contribute to the novel.
24. Can you think of any other stories, poems, movies, or songs that have similar themes to *Pandemic*? Describe them and the similarities.
25. We read books for enjoyment, but sometimes we discover that books can teach us things. What has *Pandemic* taught you? Describe what you learned in detail.
26. Identify some major themes or the central idea in the book. Where do we see examples of it? How does this theme develop throughout the book and how does it affect the outcome? Cite specific textual examples to support your responses.
27. Examine the character of Lil. How does she change throughout the course of the novel? Trace her progression from the start to the end and use specific examples to show her transformation.