

Reading Group Guide for
The Girl Who Could Breathe Under Water
by Erin Bartels

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

1. Kendra and Cami have a complicated friendship. Some of the things that affect their friendship are their differing family situations, the way each of them deals with adversity and trauma, and their feelings of both camaraderie and competitiveness with each other. Think of a close friend you had while growing up. What in your relationship was easy? What was hard? Are you still friends today? Why or why not? Is there anything you know now as an adult that might have helped you navigate that childhood friendship more positively?
2. Why do you think Kendra has such a hard time dealing with the letter from the Very Disappointed Reader? When have you experienced personal or professional criticism that was difficult to take? Do you think your response to it was ultimately a positive or negative thing in your life? If you could, what would you change about the way you respond to criticism?
3. Kendra grows up without a dad but with two father figures—her grandfather and Robert Rainier. What was your own family situation growing up? What would you change about it if you could? How do you think that would have made your life better? What would you lose from the person you are today if you hadn't had to overcome those challenges?
4. Many women have a Tyler in their life—someone who harassed, intimidated, or abused them, or who is currently doing so. While we live in a time when many women are speaking out and seeking justice, there are many reasons a woman may still choose not to do so. Did anything bother you about how Kendra handled her own experience with her abuser? Do you think that victims of sexual abuse have a responsibility to publicly accuse their abusers? Why or why not? If you have had your own experience with sexual assault and feel comfortable talking about it, was there anything you wished you'd done differently?
5. The question is asked in the book whether some things are unforgivable. We tend to rank sins and offenses—with some worse than others—and sexual assault, especially of a minor, is way up at the top of the list of the worst sins for most people. What is your belief about such things? Is there anything that is unforgivable? Why or why not? Do victims have a responsibility to forgive those who have harmed them? Why or why not? Are there any people you consider unredeemable or who cannot be rehabilitated? Does understanding how an “antagonist” came to be that way make a difference in your ability to forgive?