



TINY INFINITIES

BY J. H. DIEHL

978-1-4521-6335-2 • \$16.99 HC

Ages 10 and up • Grades 5 and up

F&P Text Level Gradient: X

Lexile® Measure: 790L

ABOUT THE BOOK

When twelve-year-old Alice's dad moves out, leaving her with her depressive mother, Alice does the only thing that feels right: She retreats to her family's old Renaissance tent in the backyard, determined to live there until her dad comes home. In an attempt to keep at least one part of her summer from changing, Alice focuses on her quest to swim freestyle fast enough to get her name on her swim team's record board. But summers contain multitudes, and soon Alice meets an odd new friend, Harriet, whose obsession with the school's science fair is equal only to her conviction that Alice's best stroke is backstroke, not freestyle. Most unexpected of all is an unusual babysitting charge, Piper, who is mostly deaf and entirely mute—until Alice hears her speak a word.

Funny and devastatingly honest, this sharply observed depiction of family, friendship, and Alice's determination to prove herself—as a babysitter, as a friend, as a daughter, as a person—rings loud and true.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide contains discussion questions designed to spark conversation about the themes and ideas raised by this novel.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jean Heilprin Diehl has an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop; this is her first novel. She lives with her family in Maryland and is now working on a new novel.

Invite an author to
your library or classroom!
[CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM/AUTHORVISIT](https://chroniclebooks.com/authorvisit)

For more information or questions about this discussion guide, contact Jaime Wong at jaime_wong@chroniclebooks.com.



DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. In the prologue, we read the following statement: “What I love most about backstroke is, it proves a person doesn’t need to be looking straight ahead to know exactly where she’s going.” What do you think this means? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Throughout the first chapter of the book Alice is continually running away from someone or something, including the police and the pool. But what else do you think she’s really running away from? What finally stops her?
3. How would you describe Alice’s relationship and communication style with her father? How about with her mother? What kind of essential support do they provide Alice? What do you think their relationships might be missing?
4. Alice has a lot of stresses to deal with, including her mom’s long-term recovery and her parents’ separation. What kind of coping mechanisms does she use? Do you think these are effective? If you were her friend, what advice might you give Alice to help her deal with her problems?
5. Alice has a remarkable ability to communicate with children. What makes her so good at this? Does she demonstrate the same abilities and skill when communicating with her peers and with adults?
6. Despite their differences, Alice and Harriett quickly become friends. Why do you think they connect so well with each other? What are the ingredients of a strong friendship?
7. In Chapter 5, “Teeny Tiny Infinity,” Harriet introduces the concept that the difference between two seemingly opposite things can be actually very small. How does this idea—the idea of “tiny infinities”—appear throughout the book?
8. One controversial decision that Alice makes is to bring Piper to her backyard and leave Timmy alone while she is babysitting. Do you think this was a good choice? Why or why not? Given what happened, if you were Alice, would you have told Mr. and Mrs. Phoebe what happened in the tent? If so, what would you have said to them?
9. When Alice has her outburst at her mother after Harriett’s failed experiment, Harriett comes upstairs to show Mrs. Allyn the syringes. What does this tell you about Harriett’s personality?
10. In Chapter 19, “The Swim Team Banquet,” Alice receives a fortune cookie fortune that reads, “It is not in your character to give up.” Thinking back over Alice’s actions throughout the book, do you think this fortune is accurate? This character trait is frequently called “grit” or “perseverance.” When does Alice demonstrate grit in the novel?
11. Though Piper makes it up, the word “bugfire” holds a particularly special resonance for Alice. What does the word symbolize to her?
12. Much of this book explores how people deal with change. How does Alice deal with change? Harriett? Owen? What ways seem to be more effective? Less effective?
13. At the beginning of the story, Alice reacts to the news that her father is leaving by exercising the silent treatment. By the end of the book, does she still think her greatest power lies in her silence? If not, where does her power come from?
14. In many ways, this novel is about the journey of growing up and getting caught in between childhood and adulthood. How would you compare Alice at the beginning of the book to Alice at the end? When does she struggle the most with making adult decisions? Do you think she changes?

