Peters, Julie Ann  **By the Time You Read This, I’ll Be Dead**

**Discussion questions:**

1. Daelyn’s last suicide attempt injured her esophagus and vocal cords. She can’t talk to others, and some students at school think she is mute. Daelyn and her silence form a relationship.
   - How does her silence insulate her?
   - Does the silence keep her a prisoner?
   - By the end of the book, the reader knows Daelyn can talk if she wants to. Why does she finally choose to speak?
   - How does the author benefit from having a silent main character?
   - List the advantages and disadvantages for Daelyn of her silence.

2. The worst is waking up in the hospital. Your parents are there, crying. Or your mother is yelling at the doctors and nurses. You come back wrecked. You ruin everyone’s day. *It won’t happen again. I promise.* (p. 29)
   - What is Daelyn promising?
   - Does her perception about how her death will affect her parents differ from the likely reality?
   - Daelyn sees her parents’ anger, but not their relief that she’s alive. Expand on this idea.
   - Daelyn is doing everything she can to make this time the last time. She has become a methodical planner. Explain her thinking.

3. Sometimes people who are broken find other people who are broken.
   - Why might that be?
   - How does it happen in this book?
   - Can they help each other back to wholeness?

4. Secrets. I can’t take them with me. If I do, when I go, when I arrive at my final destination, I’ll be . . . impure. I have no choice but to trust that they’re safe here. (p. 72)
   - There is a saying, Secrets keep us sick. How does this fit Daelyn?

5. By the time I was ten I already knew my destiny. By middle school I had a plan for escape, for control. There’s always a way out. All you have to do is take it. (p. 113)
Explain how Daelyn sees a “plan of escape” as a plan “for control.”

In one sense, Daelyn seems to be surrendering, but in another she seems to have become determined. Explain how she does both.

6. Why does Daelyn sign up for the choir? Why does the teacher go along with it so completely?

7. Girls scare me more than boys. Boys are cruel. Girls are mean. (p. 118)

Why would girls scare Daelyn more than boys?

8. She squeezes my shoulders and says, “We love you so much.” I know, I know they do, in their own helpless way. At times like this, I’m thankful I don’t feel love. (p. 126)

What might change for Daelyn if she did feel love?

9. His eyes shift to gaze down the hall after Ariel. He says in a flat voice, “I’m all she’s got and if I don’t make it this time . . .” You’ll pass through the light. A ribbon of guilt twists my stomach. I’m all Kim and Chip have too. But the difference is, they’ll be better off without me. (p. 160)

Daelyn and Santana are both concerned about their parents; how are their concerns different?

10. Santana says: “If I have to, I’ll do chemo to fight the beast. Whatever it takes to stay alive.” (p. 137)

Daelyn and Santana are each in a life-and-death conflict. How are they different? How are they alike?

11. Why does Santana want a relationship with Daelyn?

12. “I’m scared, okay? I’ve always been scared. Every day of my life I wake up terrified. I wonder who will make it their mission to hunt me down today. I can’t WAIT to be rid of that feeling.” (p. 163)

How does this quote define “bullycide”?

Is it realistic to believe that some people can feel this way?

13. “I wish you could talk because I’d like to get your thoughts on pantheism. A basic moral belief that doing harm to oneself harms us all. That we’re all interconnected.” (p. 173)

Who else will be hurt if Daelyn harms herself?

Do you subscribe to pantheism?

14. Santana presses my head to his chest. I’m heaving, I’m sobbing so hard. “We all get better too, you know. I heal you. You heal me. So sayeth Santana Lloyd Girard the Second, renowned lady-killer.” That makes me cry louder. He rests his head on mine and lets me cry it out. I think I’ll drown in my own self-pity.

(p. 197)

Because of Santana, Daelyn is no longer alone. Has his friendship come too late?

15. “If you’re around tomorrow, that is. If you don’t have plans, like drinking toxic waste or running with scissors, I would really, really like to share my birthday with you.” (p. 198)

Why is this such a significant request?

Do you think Daelyn doubts his sincerity? Why or why not?

Is this ethical?
Is it freedom of speech?
If it didn’t exist, would Daelyn stop trying to kill herself?

17. In this book, bad things happen to Daelyn.
Is one of her attackers more guilty than another?
Do you think any of the people who harass Daelyn want her to kill herself?

18. Bullycide. I know that word well. Suicide is an escape from bullying.
Before reading this book, had you ever heard of bullycide?
Do you think it happens a lot?

19. On the “Day of Determination”, Daelyn logs on and answers the final questions; she checks that she has not left anything from her past behind; she looks out the window and sees a man and his dog, and she wishes for Santana to have a dog; then she decides to complete herself. The last line is, With determination and purpose, I head into the light.
What do you believe happens on that day?