Book Club Discussion questions for *Bells for Eli*

1. Before her cousin Eli’s accident, Delia picks a stem of Queen Ann’s lace blooming in her yard and presents it to Eli’s mother, Mary Lily, who tells her niece the legend of the flower. How does Mary Lily’s story of Queen Ann’s lace symbolize Eli after his accident?
2. Discuss reasons that Eli and Delia grow into an unusually close relationship from early childhood on.
3. In spite of themselves and their recognition that cousin romance is taboo, Eli and Delia develop intimate feelings toward one another in adolescence. With the understanding that first cousin marriage was and still is legal in South Carolina where the cousins live, discuss your attitude toward their predicament and whether you believe they make the right decision.
4. Uncle Gene often makes harmful judgements concerning his son Eli, but what situations in the novel also prove his love for his son and how?
5. How is the character of Francie and her circumstances significant in Eli and Delia’s relationship?
6. Discuss how the transformative decade of the 60’s affects circumstances in the novel in contrast to traditional 1950’s values that are present in Green Branch and in the lives of characters such as Mary Lily, Jeanette, Will, Delia, Nealy, and Eli.
7. Consider the long term effects of Eli’s childhood trauma, both on Eli and the people around him.
8. The emphasis on the power of words to both hurt and heal is portrayed in *Bells for Eli.*

For example, in childhood Delia regrets a moment when she is angry and retaliates by lashing out at Eli regarding his disability: “My words lay all around us, invisible blocks to stumble over. I’d said he was weak and different, and in shaming Eli with the truth, I’d shamed all of us.” Find other references regarding the power of words in the novel and discuss meaning in these examples.

1. The motif of spirits/ghosts runs throughout *Bells for Eli,* starting with the cousins’ interest in the Ouija board. Discuss how this motif contributes to overall meaning in the novel.
2. Excluding Delia and Eli, what character would you most like to have a conversation with and why?
3. Eli is a musician, and the novel has many references to music, especially to the sound of bells. Examine how music helps create atmosphere or meaning in *Bells for Eli* in several scenes.
4. Determine several ways that bells function as an important symbol both in the title and within the novel.