

# The Things We Never Say

by Elizabeth Strout

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## About the Book

**Pulitzer Prize-winning, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Elizabeth Strout's new novel tells the story of a chance incident that sparks a powerful realization in a beloved teacher's life --- a poignant meditation on loneliness, friendship, parenthood, and the importance of truth in a capsizing world.**

Artie Dam is living a double life. He spends his days teaching history to 11th graders, expanding their young minds, correcting their casual cruelties, and lending a kind word to those who need it most. He goes to holiday parties with his wife of three decades, makes small talk with neighbors, and, on weekends, takes his sailboat out on the beautiful Massachusetts Bay. He is, by all appearances, present and alive. But inside, Artie is plagued by feelings of isolation. He looks out at a world gone mad --- at himself and the people around him --- and turns a question over and over in his mind: How is it that we know so little about one another, even those closest to us?

And then, one day, Artie learns that life has been keeping a secret from him, one that threatens to upend his entire world. Once he learns it, he is forced to chart a new course, to reconsider the relationships he holds most dear --- and to make peace with the mysteries at the heart of our existence.

Elizabeth Strout, as we have come to expect, delivers a moving exploration of the human condition --- one that brims with compassion for each and every one of her indelible characters. With exquisite prose and profound insight, *THE THINGS WE NEVER SAY* takes one man's fears and loneliness and makes them universal. And, in the same breath, captures the abiding love that sustains and holds us all.

## Discussion Guide

1. "I wonder why people never say anything real," Artie says to Evie after a party. Later in the novel, he comes to his own conclusions about why. Why do you think it's so tempting to keep conversations at surface level? What do we gain

when we do choose to go deeper?

2. Do you believe Artie experienced precognition when he dreamt of the water before his accident? Why or why not? Have you ever had an experience that felt similarly uncanny? Discuss.

3. What are some of the themes you noticed in this novel?

4. What is it about Artie that touches his students so deeply, even years later? Who was your favorite teacher growing up --- and what do you think sets them apart from the others in your memory?

5. What secrets are each of the characters hiding from other people? From themselves?

6. When these secrets are revealed, how are characters' relationships and self-perceptions affected?

7. "He had somehow missed this fact about every single person: that they held within themselves a vast, unknowable universe." What does this quotation mean to you? To what extent do you think we can truly know another person?

8. How does Artie and Evie's relationship evolve over the course of the novel? Artie and Rob's? Evie and Rob's? How does their family dynamic as a whole shift?

9. Elizabeth Strout's characters (like Olive Kitteridge, Lucy Barton and now Artie Dam), tend to be ordinary people living seemingly unremarkable lives. Yet as their hopes, memories and fears come alive on the page, their ordinariness becomes something extraordinary. How do you think Strout accomplishes this?

10. What scene or passage from *THE THINGS WE NEVER SAY* has stayed with you longest? Why?

## Author Bio

Elizabeth Strout is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *THE THINGS WE NEVER SAY*; *TELL ME EVERYTHING*, an Oprah's Book Club pick; *LUCY BY THE SEA*; *OH WILLIAM!*; *OLIVE, AGAIN*; *ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE*, winner of the Story Prize; *MY NAME IS LUCY BARTON*; *THE BURGESS BOYS*; *OLIVE KITTERIDGE*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize; *ABIDE WITH ME*; and *AMY AND ISABELLE*, winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction and the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Prize. She has also been a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Orange Prize in London. She lives in Maine.

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