

# NOT A SOUND

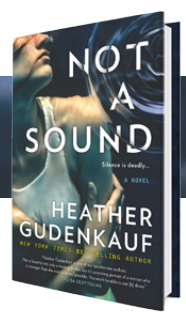
Silence is deadly...

A NOVEL



# HEATHER GUDENKAUF

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



# Characters

- Amelia
- Gwen
- Stitch
- Marty
- David
- Evan
- Nora
- Dr. Huntley
- Jake
- Peter

# Character Discussion

- Amelia obviously has some issues from her past that cause people in her life to question her judgment. As you were reading, did you consider her a reliable narrator? Or did you find yourself questioning her perspective as well?
- Which character do you believe changed the most throughout the story? How did they evolve? Was it for the better or worse?
- Stitch acts as a sounding board of sorts for Amelia and her reactions. How did their relationship add to the overall narrative? How did Stitch help you understand Amelia better?
- Which character(s) did you find yourself sympathizing with the most throughout the story? Did you find that it changed as the novel progressed?
- What were your initial thoughts about each of the suspects as they were introduced? (Evan, David, Peter, Marty).

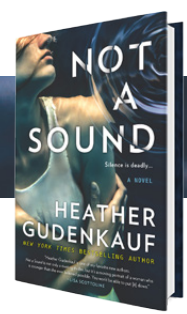


# Plot Discussion

- How does Amelia's hearing impairment add to the plot? Does it add suspense in certain scenes? Does it make her more vulnerable and some ways and stronger in others? How?
- How would the plot have changed if Amelia hadn't been in the accident that caused her to lose her hearing?
- What, in your opinion, was the most suspenseful scene? How did it drive the overall plot and resolution?
- This novel has an exceptional number of plot twists and turns. Did you find yourself convinced of one outcome only to have it undone by a new revelation?
- This novel had multiple persons of interest. How did the author work to create suspicion around each of these characters?
- Did you anticipate the ending? Knowing who the killer is now, discuss the clues that the author left for the reader along the way.

# Theme and Symbols

- The river plays a large role in this story. Discuss what events take place in and around the river and why the author selected it as the setting for some of the novel's most suspenseful moments.
- Amelia used to cope with her issues by turning to alcohol. Then, she leaned on her trips to the river. Discuss how you cope with stressful situations.
- How is the motif of sound (or lack of sound) implemented throughout the story?
- Since Amelia can't hear, what other senses do you feel are emphasized in this book?
- What other themes and symbols did you notice throughout the book?



# Questions for the Author Heather Gudenkauf

**Q: How did you go about researching what it is like to be deaf?**

While I have a significant hearing loss, I do not know what it is like to be completely deaf like the character of Amelia, and it was important for me to portray her in a realistic, accurate and respectful manner. To do so I connected with early readers with profound deafness who were willing to give me invaluable insights. I also consulted with a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing, the mother of a profoundly deaf child, a doctor of audiology (who happens to be my brother) and a speech pathologist. The expertise they provided was crucial to the novel.

**Q: Amelia is not born deaf; her hearing loss is caused by an accident. How does it change the way she relates to the world?**

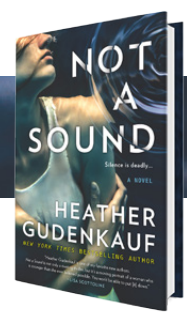
Like many who have gone through a traumatic life event, Amelia defines time as before and after. Before the accident that caused her deafness, Amelia was a happily married mother and well-respected nurse. After the accident, she copes with the loss of her hearing by isolating herself from those she loves and cares about and ultimately goes into a downward spiral fueled by alcohol. However, after hitting rock bottom, Amelia comes to the realization that she's the only one who can turn her life around and makes a concerted effort to do just this. She begins to lay the groundwork for regaining her family, her career and her friendships.

**Q: Certainly one of the most endearing characters in the book is Amelia's service dog, Stitch. What kind of dog is he and why are his commands in Czech?**

I love Stitch! I envisioned him as a Slovak Rough-haired Pointer. They have silver-colored, wiry coats and what is called facial furnishings - which is just a fancy way of saying moustaches. Pointers are beautiful dogs with lots of personality. In the novel, a Czech police dog trainer rescues Stitch and trains him to be a hearing service dog. He uses Czech commands with his dogs because it is his native language. Interestingly, in doing my research I learned about half the police dogs in the United States have some connection to the Czech Republic.

I also learned about all the amazing the kind of services dogs can offer - everything from hearing, therapy, seizure response and guide service. I have a friend whose daughter is diabetic and her service dog is able to detect by scent, when her blood sugar is at dangerous levels - incredible! As I began my research, I learned very quickly that while Labradors and German Shepherds have been the traditional service dog picks, there are many other options. I also learned that many hearing dog programs actually rescue their dogs from shelters and as long as the dog is friendly and people-oriented, has the skills, energy and readiness to work the instant a sound occurs they can be an effective hearing dog.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



**Q: Although they are written within the conventions of psychological suspense, your novels also always offer strong character studies. How do you achieve the latter without bogging down the thriller aspects of narrative?**

Creating strong characters while plotting a compelling, suspenseful fast-moving story can be tricky. For me, the mystery and the premise of the novel are what draws readers in but it's the characters that entice readers stay to find out what happens next. The characters I create need to be relatable enough for readers to see glimpses of themselves in the motivations and actions of the characters. The trick is being able to layer delicately just enough of the history and experience of the characters to keep the reader invested in the story.

**Q: Why did you choose to make Amelia a nurse?**

As the writing process tends to go sometimes, the characters have a way of taking over and making the decisions. As I wrote NOT A SOUND, it became clear very quickly, that Amelia's vocation would be nursing. I'm a big fan of nurses for dozens of reasons, the main one being that my mom was a nurse. I've always admired the caring, nurturing nature of nurses paired with their organization and efficiency. Nurses get things done!

**Q: Critics are singling Amelia out as a particularly intriguing and memorable character—despite of, or perhaps because of, her flaws. How do you create a well-rounded, multi-dimensional character?**

Humans are complicated. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, we have our finer moments and those moments we wish we could take back. I attempted to create a character that readers could recognize as someone they might know – that friend or family member who struggles but wants desperately to get their life back on track. Amelia is determined to regain the life she lost due in part to her accident and then to her own poor choices. In messy fits and starts she begins the journey back to herself and because of this I fell in love with Amelia's flaws just as much as her strengths. I hope readers feel the same way.

**Q: The novel is set in Iowa, which is a place that many who don't know it picture as nothing more than miles of farmland. Yet the landscape you depict is actually quite varied and dramatic. What role does the landscape play in this story?**

I've encountered many people who haven't had the opportunity to visit my home state and do have that traditional image of a flat landscape filled with miles and miles of cornfields. Iowa does have its share of cornfields, which are lovely, but it also has rocky bluffs, tallgrass prairies, limestone caves and sharp ravines. Iowa also boasts over 27,000 miles of rivers and streams and about 44,000 acres of forest. The bluffs, rivers and ravines play a huge part in NOT A SOUND. Not only do Amelia and Stitch have to battle a villain of the homo sapiens sort, they have to navigate the elements and some brutal, but beautiful terrain, in order to survive.