Transparency

Stories

by Frances Hwang

Reading Group Guide

1. Agnes loathes her father's new wife, Lily, in the story "The Old Gentleman." Did you feel any sympathy for Lily? Why or why not?

2. In "A Visit to the Suns," June is asked to encourage her cousin Helen to leave the oppressive religious group that Helen recently joined. In the end, though, June doesn't push Helen to change her ways. Should she have?

3. The characters in "The Modern Age" sit around a table telling one another "persecuted ancestor stories." Are there any similar stories in your family's history? If not, what other types of family stories have been passed down to you?

4. In "Intruders," Susan discovers a note from Andrea written in her diary and tears the page out because she says she doesn't want Andrea's thoughts to be mistaken for her own. Do you think Susan resembles Andrea in any way? How are they different from each other?

5. In "Garden City," Mr. Chen ultimately evicts his tenant, Marnie Wilson, from her apartment. Should he have acted differently? How would you have responded in his situation?

6. Do you see any parallels in plot or character in "Transparency" and "Garden City"? What cultural and familial misunderstandings arise in both stories?

7. The protagonist in "The Modern Age" says at the end of the story, "As for my boyfriend and me, we had been together for over a year, yet not once had the word love been spoken between us. Our hearts seemed too small for such a word to pass between our lips." What was your reaction to this statement? Do the relationships described in Hwang's collection seem familiar to you? Why?

8. "Sonata for the Left Hand" is composed of three sections, each part taking place in a different city and among different characters in the narrator's life. What did Hwang accomplish by writing this story in the way she did? Did the three parts of the story come together for you by the end?

9. What do the stories in *Transparency* say about solitude? Is it a cross to bear, a choice that encourages personal strength and freedom, or a bit of both? Is solitude something you seek in your own life, or do you try to avoid it?