

Story-by-Story Reading Guide for *Seedlings, Stories of Relationships*

1. **The Seven-Second Connection.** The author's father taught his children by doing. Why do you think she was embarrassed by his friendliness? Although his larger than life personality embarrassed her as a child, she adopted many of the same characteristics. Does the young character's embarrassment seem real? Has this happened to you? Who influenced you as a child? Are you the "Dad" in someone's life? How do you connect with people?
2. **Not My Tribe.** In spite of remarking about the young people in her life, do you think the author feels "old"? Do you make comparisons with age groups in your life? Who is your tribe?
3. **A New Romance at Forty.** The author swore off marriage after the death of her first husband. Does this seem real? Have you known people like that? What are your thoughts about the "no sex for 90 days" policy? Does it make sense? Do you think you have to "settle" in a relationship?
4. **The Love Seat.** Does the main character seem shallow? Even though she learned about her love for wicker in this relationship, is there deeper credence to the phrase of "from each relationship we learn."
5. **They Were in Love.** This snippet of a poem is prefaced with "Sometimes you have to go through the torment of finding out what you don't want in a relationship in order to know what you do want." Discuss how this may or may not work.
6. **Windows of Opportunity.** Is the plot engaging? What is the relationship of the daughter with her father? How did the author create an image of her dying father? What windows opened in this chapter? What windows have opened for you in your life? What did you do?
7. **Ankle Bracelets and High Tops.** The author uses the term "visual candy" in this chapter. Which character presented a visual image for you? What is your hometown like?
8. **Empty Nest.** How do the hummingbirds connect with the author's life? Have you had the empty nest experience? What was/is it like? Do you think the author really did all she could to stay connected to her stepdaughters? How did the author's launch experience differ from her stepdaughters? From yours?
9. **Craggy.** What is the message of the stereotype of being craggy? Do you think this has a serious effect on the author? What aging issues are on the horizon for you?
10. **Things I Love About My Body.** Did this get your attention? What's on your list? How would the list read ten years ago? Ten years from now?
11. **Compassion Ambassadors.** There are two stories in this piece—the author's commitment to compassion and young children showing compassion. In what ways is the author exploring compassion? How do you define compassion? How do you show it? In the classroom setting, how would you have shown compassion to the new student from Zaire? Describe the gravity and velocity experiment. Would you have interfered? How did Class Prankster show his other side? Have you seen Different Ones in your life? How are they treated? What can you do to show compassion?
12. **Aging—It's All Relative.** Do you think the mother-in-law's processing issues are something to be concerned over? What aging changes have you seen in those around you? In yourself?
13. **Losing Things.** The author uses humor about her aging process, yet there is truth in jest. Do you think she is truly upset by her aging?

14. **A Summer Portrait.** How is Mrs. Desmains an exotic creature in the main character's world? Who has influenced you in this way?
15. **Big Al.** Big Al prided himself on his three omissions. What were they? Are these things to be proud of? What is the purpose of this story?
16. **Evolution of a Health Nut.** The author plays with time here. Is the era (1950s and 1960s) and family background apparent from the author's descriptions? How? In what ways does the author become like her mother? Has this happened to you—yet?
17. **My Mother's Hands.** How is the focus on hands key in this story? Did you feel the need to know about the Mother's other physical characteristics? What kind of a person do you think she was? How does the author relate to her mother's changes?
18. **Pegasus.** The timeline in Pegasus goes back to college and then ahead to the last few years of her mother's life. What picture does this display of the mother? How is this different or the same as the mother in My Mother's Hands.
19. **A Mother's Gift.** Do you think the two walkers would be friends if they did not walk together? What was the gift? Readers have said they also received a mother's gift? What was yours?
20. **The Dog Days of Summer.** This is one of the few work-based stories in the book. Does the setting come across clearly? How does Rowena strike you? How would you deal with a Rowena at work? Even though Hank is introduced at the beginning he is not the main character. Does this work in reading the story? Describe the bond between Rowena and Alma? Do you know anyone like this?
21. **You, Me, and Somebody.** This snapshot piece illustrates a relationship coping device in many partnerships. How is it used in this one? Have you seen it used elsewhere? How is this like a circle story?
22. **You Get What You Pay For.** The story takes us from the era of the Depression to the present by the shifts in money attitudes in a family. What kind of a picture do you get about the mother and father? Is the mother's attitude about money at the end of the story believable? Why or why not?
23. **A Rose for Karen.** Is this a story of forgiveness or about the disease of alcohol? What feelings do you have for the dad? Do your feelings change by the end of the story? How? Does Karen appear believable in her ability to forgive? Does the device of having the story written in diary form add or detract from the story?
24. **Summer Stock.** How did you experience this story? Were you engaged right away? Could you relate to the times? The age of the characters? Who is the main character? What are your feelings towards Sidney Jr.? Does this remind you of your own high school friendships? How have times changed in employment situations?
25. **Low Gear.** Does the main character, She, exhibit believable traits? Have you known anyone like her? What do you think of the narrator's attitude towards She? What was the epiphany?
26. **Earl's Stroke.** Describe Earl and Margaret? How do you know they care about each other? What changes did Earl go through pre- and post-stroke? Does humor enhance or detract from this story?
27. **Ivan and the French Fries.** What is the theme of this story? Is the family dynamic believable? What is Ivan's dilemma? Is the ending satisfying?
28. **Kindergarten Cuisine.** How does the author set the scene for this chapter? How does the young teacher adapt her lifestyle to her teaching career? Have you known teachers like Mrs. Ball? How do you react in the midst of an awkward situation?

29. **Shopping with Ellen.** What is the theme of this story? Adolescence is often a time of exploration of values and relationships. What is being explored here? Do you think the narrator was weak? What are your feelings towards Ellen? Disapproval? Envy? Sympathy? Did the ending surprise you? Did you ever go “shopping”?
30. **Be Prepared.** What is the plot of this chapter? What are some relationships in this story?
31. **The Heel.** How does the author use self-deprecating humor in this story? How does this couple handle their communications? What do you think about “being the architect of your relationship”? What status does the heel have in your home?
32. **Automotive Adventures.** This story tells about an 82-year-old woman with just a little background of her past life. Is the past background necessary? What words would you use to describe this Mother? Do you think she enjoys “shocking” her daughter?
33. **Dancing with My Mother.** Aging brings changes and sometimes a solidifying of traits. What are the traits of the Dancing mother? How would you describe the mother/daughter relationship? How is this mother different/the same as the mother in Automotive Adventures? Discuss your experience with aging parents.
34. **Leave-Taking.** What do you think of Betty and Hodges solution to leave-taking? Does the setting of the support group enhance the story?
35. **Our Anniversary.** What changes this chapter from a basic list to a love poem?
36. **Catherine the Great.** How does the author use exaggeration to build up to the climax? What compliments does Catherine pay to the narrator? What other life episodes could be expanded into a humorous story?
37. **Kind.** What is the message of “Kind”? What other message does the author give in describing her personality?
38. **Leave-Taking II.** How does the author create the metaphor of the dance between Joanie and Ardin? Do you feel as if you are an observer at the party? What leave-taking strategies do you employ with a partner or alone at an event? Do they work?
39. **Walking the Labyrinth.** This meditative story is meant to take you on a labyrinth walk. Does it work? How is this the same/different from labyrinth walks you have experienced? How does the author use the five senses to create a mood?
40. **Making a List.** The author’s list was filled with personality and character traits, but no physical attributes. Is this a serious omission? What would be on your list? Have you ever based a relationship on “potential”?
41. **Rules for Fighting Fair.** Is a Rule List necessary in a relationship? What parts of the list do you agree with? Disagree? What would be on your list? How might this be adapted to the work environment or a classroom?
42. **The ABCs of Retirement.** It has been said that a successful retirement needs the perspective of going towards something new rather than escaping from something old. Do you agree? At what age do you consider someone old?