

Further Reading

Someone
Alice McDermott (2013)
MCDERMOTT

The story of a Brooklyn-born woman's life: her family, her neighborhood, her daily trials and triumphs, from childhood to old age.

This is the Story of a Happy Marriage
Ann Patchett (2013)
BIOGRAPHY PATCHETT

Ann Patchett, author of *State of Wonder*, *Run*, and *Bel Canto*, examines her deepest commitments, to writing, family, friends, dogs, books, and her husband, creating a resonant portrait of her life.

Some Luck : The Last Hundred Years Trilogy, A Novel
Jane Smiley (2014)
SMILEY

An epic novel that spans thirty years in the lives of a farm family in Iowa, telling a parallel story of the changes taking place in America from 1920 through the early 1950's.

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Book Discussion Guide



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About the Book

The Whitshanks are a family that radiates togetherness. But they are also like all families in that the stories they tell themselves reveal only part of the picture. Abby and Red and their four grown children have accumulated not only tender moments, laughter, and celebrations, but also jealousies, disappointments, and carefully guarded secrets.

Discussion Questions

1. The novel opens and closes with Denny. Do you think he's the main character? If not, who is?
2. On page 10, Tyler writes, "Well, of course they did hear from him again. The Whitshanks weren't a melodramatic family." What type of family are they? Compare the way you see them with the way they see themselves.
3. Chapter 2 begins with the Whitshank family stories: "These stories were viewed as quintessential (pg. 40)." Why are these two stories so important? Why is the story of Red's sister important to Red's family?
4. How does Abby's story about the day she fell in love with Red fit into the Whitshank family history? Why isn't it one of the family's two defining stories?
5. Much is made of Abby's "orphans," which we learn also include Stem. What does her welcoming of strangers into her home say about her character? How do the others' responses set up a subtle contrast?
6. Why didn't Abby tell Red about Stem's mother? Why didn't Denny tell Stem? And why, after they learn the truth, does Stem make Red and Denny promise not to tell anyone else?
7. The novel isn't structured chronologically. How does Tyler use shifts in time to reveal character and change the reader's perception?
8. After reading their story, how did your opinion of Linnie Mae change?
9. The Whitshank house, built by Junior and maintained by Red, is practically a character in the novel. What does it mean to the Whitshank family? Why, in the end, does it seem easy for Red to leave?
10. We don't learn the full significance of the title until near the end (on pg. 350). How did this delay make the metaphor more powerful? What is the metaphor?