

DEAR CANADA

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Hoping for Home Stories of Arrival

Discussion Questions: General

1. Do you know anyone who immigrated to Canada from another country? How long ago? Did they come by ship, train, car? Was it an uneventful journey or one that had some kind of dangers or difficulties associated with it?
2. The characters in the stories come from all sorts of backgrounds. Verity Hall's family is wealthy enough to send her to boarding school. Wong Joe-on and Harriet James are both poor. Other characters fall in between. What does it mean to be well off? What are some of the things "money just can't buy" for the people in these stories?
3. In most of the stories, the characters make a friend, or long for one. Sometimes it's easy, like with Amy and Irene, or Zayd and Joe. But it can be hard too. Pick one of the stories and discuss how a challenge in your life can turn into something quite different if you have a friend, or if a new friend helps you through it.
4. Of all the characters in the anthology, which one would you most like for your own friend? Why?
5. In what ways might recent immigrants try to fit in and "be Canadian"? What traditions might they most hold onto from their place of origin? Why do you think these traditions would be the strongest? What does it mean to be Canadian?

Discussion Questions: Story-related

1. The story that starts the anthology, "Marooned in Canada," begins on almost the same day that the last story, "Hattie's Home," ends. What are some of the things in the stories that are the same, and what things are different? Why do you think the stories were placed that way in the book?
2. What sort of home is Penman hoping for in "Entrance Certificate," and what keeps that from happening? What outlook on life does Penman display? How does humour factor into his journal and his letter to his father?
3. Imagine you are Insy coming home in "The Charleston at the Trapline." What kinds of sights or sounds or experiences of your days in a larger town or city would be most important to tell your mother once you're home again? If you were Insy's father, how would you feel about the hospital staff burning Insy's clothes?
4. Imagine you could give some advice to Verity in "Marooned in Canada." What would you tell her about making friends or keeping friends that might help her feel less alone? If you were her penpal, what would you write in a letter to her?

Discussion Questions: Story-related continued

5. If you were like Amy in “Ghost Town” and could only pack one small thing to take with you — and you didn’t know when or even if you could go home again — what would you take? What would you miss most if you had to leave it behind?
6. Amy and Kay view the internment very differently. Is one of them more “right” than the other? Which of the girls do you think will manage better in the internment camp?
7. Did Zayd’s chasing the runaway baby carriage in “To Get Away from All That” change how people in his school saw him? Did he think that he himself changed?
8. Have you ever been falsely accused, like Harriet James in “The Flower of the Flock”? How did you prove you were not guilty? How did it change your relationship with the person who accused you?
9. Imagine you are Wong Jo-on, eager to explore life in your new town, but confined to the kitchen and the café in “Prairie Showdown.” How would you regard the prairies after you have just travelled on a train through the Rockies and the foothills? What would you most want to do if you could have just one day to explore?
10. In the story “In the Silence of My Heart,” Miriam says she has a “mind-album” of pictures of relatives who are now lost to her, so she can remember her cousins and aunts well. How do we store information about ourselves and our friends today? What would you remember if you had to leave the country you were born in?
11. The story of Solomon Washington in “To Learn . . . Even a Little” is based on real events. In reality, Mr. Washington won his court case, but the legal fees were so high that he lost his farm. What would this mean for Solomon? Would he and his parents think that the fight was worth it? Do you? Why or why not?
12. In “Out of the Ashes,” Yvonne’s older brother makes a huge promise to try to save his mother’s life. Yet Yvonne has seen him as a messy pest, not as someone who might become a priest. Have any of your siblings/parents/relatives done something that astonished you because it seemed so out of character? After the fact, did you begin to see some hints of that surprising behaviour?
13. Hattie makes a list of all the things that most remind her of home, in “Hattie’s Home.” If you could only list 10 things that “say home” to you, what would these be? What kinds of things are they?