

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

The Facts of Life by Graham Joyce

- What makes the Vine family strong? What makes it unique? What are the similarities and differences between the family members?
- Motherhood is an important theme. How would you describe the various mothers? As a strong matriarchal figure, how does Martha influence and direct her family? Do you see any of her qualities carried on in her daughters?
- There is a strong element of the supernatural in this novel. Are these experiences convincing? Do you need to suspend disbelief to enjoy the novel?
- How are some of the characters affected by their mystical experiences?
- What is Joyce's attitude about the dead?
- What do you think is the significance of the title?
- Beatie says she looks at life differently than do her sisters. How do you think her viewpoint differs? How do some of the other characters look at life?
- What is the significance of the time period and the place, Coventry, portrayed in the novel? Joyce says he wanted to write about "the conflicting values that go into raising a child and to let that stand in for the arguments about how to rebuild a city." How does the rebuilding of Coventry parallel the raising of Frank?
- What characterizes Joyce's writing style? How would you describe his use of humor?
- The novel contains many strongly-featured characters. One reviewer (*Library Journal*) wrote that Joyce could have omitted several sisters to create a "more focused, magical, gripping tale." Do you agree? Do you think there is a main character in this novel? If so who is it?
- Does Joyce tie things up pretty well at the end or leave loose ends?
- Which characters change or develop in the course of the story? In what way? How does Frank change the lives of others in his family?
- Females are quite powerful in the story. What are some of the ways that Joyce depicts women's power over men?
- How are the men portrayed? Do you agree with Martha that men don't see what's going on? (p.18) How are they as father figures for Frank?
- Peregrine Feek tells Frank that "philosophy is the hunt for truth." When he asks Frank if he knows what the truth is, Frank says that "it's always hidden." In your opinion, what are some of the truths hidden in this novel?
- What purpose does the epilogue serve? Was it necessary?
- Do you think that Frank will make a well-balanced adult?
- Did you enjoy this book? What, in your opinion, are its major strengths/weaknesses?



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