

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

The Little Disturbances of Man by Grace Paley

General questions:

- What is the significance of the title of this story collection, *The Little Disturbances of Man*, (appears on pg. 99 in "An Interest in Life") and the subtitle, *Stories of Women and Men at Love*? What is the difference between being "at" love and "in" love?
- Paley's stories are considered excellent examples of Jewish humor. What characterizes Jewish humor?
- Paley said, "Writing the lives of women *is* politics." How do these stories illustrate this statement? How are her stories political?
- Two of the stories, "The Contest" and "An Irrevocable Diameter," have a male narrator. Are these as successful as the stories narrated by women?
- Paley said that "everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life." Talk about this in terms of the characters in these stories.
- Comment on the short story form. Does it serve these pieces well or did you wish for more?

Questions for some individual stories:

Goodbye and Good Luck

- Who is telling the story? What is the significance of Rose's last name, Lieber?
- What do you think Lillie's reaction to her aunt's story is?
- What does the phrase "goodbye and good luck" mean in the story?
- On pg. 21 Aunt Rose says, speaking of Vlashkin: "And like men are, too, till time's end, trying to get away in one piece." What is meant by this?

A Woman Young and Old

- Who is the narrator in this story?
- Josie throws herself at Brownie ... what do you think of their behavior?
- How does Josie change in the story and how do we find her at the end? What has she learned?

A Pale Pink Roast

- Why does Anna see Peter as "the Pale Pink Roast"?
- Why does she cheat on her husband? Does she really mean she did it for love?

The Loudest Voice

- What does this story say about assimilation and feminism? What about the different attitudes of the mother and father towards Shirley's part in the play?
- Why does Shirley characterize the Christians as "lonesome"? (pg. 63)

The Contest

- What are the implications of the title?
- Freddy says that "women isolate you" (pg. 76) What does he mean?
- What does Dotty see in Freddy?



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