

All the Rage by A.L. Kennedy

1. In her *Paris Stories*, revered short story writer Mavis Gallant states: “Stories are not chapters of novels. They should not be read one after another, as if they were meant to follow along. Read one. Shut the book. Read something else. Come back later. Stories can wait.” Although Kennedy’s stories in *All the Rage* can stand alone, is the order in which they are arranged essential to your enjoyment of each of them and the overall collection? Are there links between the stories that might be lost if they did not appear in a single collection, and that make it more interesting as a whole?
2. What is the significance of the title, *All the Rage*? Does the title encapsulate some aspect of each story? Outline the ways in which it is relevant to the collection. Would another title from the collection have better captured all of the stories?
3. From the dark tones represented through succulent figs and an admiring lover’s eyes to the “graded shades of pink” worn by a small child, “Late in Life” is a story awash in colour (p. 8). What might the vibrant range of hues that Kennedy employs symbolize? Where does a startling flash of the same colours emerge in another story? Are the independent appearances of like colours in two different stories somehow connected in terms of what the colours might signify?
4. Seemingly at odds with his desire that his existence leave no traces, the narrator of “Because It’s a Wednesday” craves for everything in his life to be labelled and explicitly identified. He even ruminates on which sexual term best classifies his relationship with the woman who cleans his flat. Ironically, some mysterious labelling in his flat does not seem to bother him. Why does the categorization of things in his flat fail to preoccupy him in the way other marks, names, and labels do?
5. What admirable life lessons or possible philosophies do we learn from dogs in Kennedy’s stories?
6. In “These Small Pieces” and “Run Catch Run,” Kennedy captures the particularly poignant heartbreak experienced by children. One story is told from the perspective of an adult remembering the past, perhaps not having fully moved on from his childhood, and the other is told directly from a child’s point of view. What are the benefits and challenges of one perspective over the other? Which of the two perspectives achieves the strongest emotional resonance? Why?
7. Is Dorothy in “The Practice of Mercy” glad or relieved to be solitary? In reality, do you believe she is lonely? Why, or why not?
8. What is the significance of the swimmer on the rocky beach in “Run Catch Run?”
9. “There was something about kissing her while she tasted of contempt — there was a depth in that, an intoxication” (p. 92). Compare the connection between Mark and Pauline in “All the Rage” as illustrated by their kisses to that of the strangers on a first date in “This Man.”

10. Do the relationships in “Because It’s a Wednesday” and “All the Rage” have any redeeming qualities, or are they all damaged and perverse? If so, what are their redeeming qualities? Would it be possible to tell these stories from the perspectives of Carmen, Pauline, or Emily?
11. *All the Rage* brims with brilliant, inventive imagery and wordplay. From suggesting that a fake vagina could serve as a “novelty letter box,” to describing dreamless sleeps as “unillustrated” nights, to the idea of using a person’s minus one prescription glasses to help “Vaselin[e] over my appreciation of someone who would benefit from blurring,” Kennedy offers vibrant and often entertaining or startling analogies (p. 25, p. 61, p. 96). Provide other examples that give you a fresh look at certain emotions or situations. How does Kennedy’s use of imagery enhance your reading experience?
12. Based on the accumulation of Mike’s comments and clues at the end of “Takes You Home,” did the story end in the way that you expected it to? Why, or why not?
13. The word “nothing” echoes in interesting, haunting, and sometimes confusing contexts throughout the stories in *All the Rage*. On the one hand, many characters seem to struggle with the feeling that they are nothing or that their presence goes unnoticed. Often, they want to be something, or at least something to someone in particular. For example, Mark in “All the Rage” offers these thoughts, seemingly directed to his wife: “And this me, this nothing — she could have that, too. You could have it all and it’s a lot, it’s really something” (p. 96). On the other hand, many characters actually desire some form of nothingness or anonymity. Provide other examples of characters throughout *All the Rage* who struggle with this existential — or simply very practical — dilemma.