

## BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

### *Chez L'Arabe* by Mireille Silcoff

1. In the first story, "Chez l'arabe" is the name the protagonist's husband gives to the Persian restaurant from which she gets her lunches. What is the significance of "Chez l'arabe" as the title for this story? How does this work as a title for the whole collection?
2. Discuss the organization of this collection. Why do you think the stories appear in the particular sequence they do? What do the stories have in common? How does the structure affect your reading of the stories?
3. Discuss the theme of racial difference in the four first-person narratives from the collection — "Chez l'arabe," "Appalachian Spring," "Shalom Israel!" and "Flower Watching."
4. In "Appalachian Spring," the protagonist talks about loneliness. What shape does hers take, and how does she deal with it?
5. In "Appalachian Spring," what is the significance of the protagonist's grandmother and of the parallels and contrasts she makes between her and May Wallace? Why is Aaron Copland important?
6. What does the protagonist want in "Appalachian Spring," and what does stealing May Wallace's diary give her?
7. *Chez L'Arabe* addresses loneliness, failed relationships, debilitating illness or ailments, fulfillment or lack thereof, loss of mental capacity, memory, the documentation of one's life (through writing, photos, architecture), relationships between mothers and daughters, racism, food, and place. Discuss at least one of these topics and identify how it relates to one or more of the stories.
8. How do the protagonist's ailments affect her in "Chez l'arabe," "Appalachian Spring," "Shalom Israel!" and "Flower Watching?"

9. Discuss how the topic of memory is depicted in “Shalom Israel!”
10. Characters throughout the collection continually attempt to create or bring beauty into their lives. How is this demonstrated in “Champ de Mars,” for example? Why do you think there is such an emphasis on beauty in Silcoff’s stories?
11. *Chez L’Arabe* explores ideas of minimalism and materialism. How do “Champ de Mars,” “Complimentarity,” and “Eskimos,” for example, deal with these contrasts? What message do you believe Silcoff is trying to convey through her exploration of these topics?
12. What causes the main character’s relationship with her husband, Antoine, to fall apart over the course of the four first-person stories in this book?
13. What is the significance of the title “Flower Watching?”
14. “Eskimos” is one story in the collection that openly uses humour. What does the light tone tell us about Gerry’s character and his attitude towards his marriage, his previous marriages, and his father’s death?