

DISCUSSION GUIDE

As the characters in these stories travel on their life's journey, we empathize with their trials and are able to envision the circumstances they find themselves in while we share their joys and disappointments.

Part of why we are able to relate to the characters so well is because of the universal human qualities they possess—reflections of our very own traits. Through the act of imagining we are able to place ourselves in the stories and, with little effort, imagine how we would have felt or what we would have done in their situations.

While this Discussion Guide has specific questions for each story, there are a few questions that groups can ask while they discuss *any* of the stories:

- Which character in the story do you, at least in part, resemble?
- What aspects of the character's personality that you resemble would you like to change? Which aspects do you hope will remain the same?
- Which character would you like to become?

Think of these questions as you consider the other story-specific questions. Your answers may surprise you.

A Story Not Told, a Song Not Sung

- Sharing our stories helps us connect with the people in our lives. However, there are times when people keep their stories to themselves because they do not feel anyone wants to listen. Think of a time when you tried to share a story and the listener was inattentive. Which of the feelings described in the story did you experience? What other emotions did you feel?

- Now think of a time when you told a story and the listener responded with interest and compassion. How did that make you feel? How did you respond?
- Describe what you see as the main theme of this story.

Baucis and Philemon

- What do the vivid food descriptions add to the story? Think of a time when food was part of an event in your life. In what ways did the food contribute to the environment you were in? What does it add to this story?
- Strangers often make us feel uncomfortable or fearful. Think of a time when you were a stranger. How were you made to feel welcome (or not)? What did you feel in that situation?
- Think of a time when you were in a situation to welcome someone. What happened? What about the event do you wish was different?

Catch-the-Wind

- When physical wounds heal, they can produce visible scars that are easily recognized. Imagine that you are standing next to the bell tower surrounded by sympathetic listeners. What story would you tell? What would you like your listeners to say in response to your story?
- Think of a time when someone told you about a wound or scar of their own. Would you change anything about your response? How would your response differ now?

Because I Can

- The woman who is the beggar in this story must rely on the kindness of others for survival. Imagine that you are that woman. Envision the circumstances that have caused you to beg. How does it feel to have to beg? What do you feel as a result of the disdainful faces of the men at that table? Describe the emotions you experience when the generous man heaps coins into your hand.
- Continue the story. Imagine the woman's meal that evening. What does she serve her children? What does the woman tell them? How do her children respond?

The Juggler and the Priest

- Many images in this story reveal the extraordinary marvels found in the ordinary world. Which images resonate with you? What is something simple in your life that continues to be a source of joy and wonder for you? How do you share this joy with others?
- Both the priest and the juggler, at a point in their lives, distanced themselves from the world around them. Eventually, they connected with the world through their special talents. What gifts do you possess that allow you to connect with those around you? In what ways do you connect with others?
- The priest offers the juggler a respite from his loneliness and the opportunity to discover happiness by helping others. Who in your life has enabled you to learn an important life lesson? How were these lessons taught? Who do you teach them too?

The Magic Paintbrush

- Each of us possesses talents and abilities that we can use to enrich our own life as well as the lives of those around us. Think of your talents and abilities. Is there a capability that you have not fully developed? What holds you back?
- Which of your talents are you most proud of?
- In what ways do you see people around you sharing their talents and abilities?

A Dream for Ruth

- Despite hardship, Ruth always found a way to bring beauty into her life and the lives of those around her. Explore the relationship between happiness and possessions. What is that relationship for Ruth? How about for you?
- How does Ruth's mother's ability to make a place feel like home effect Ruth?
- How do you find and create beauty in your life?

Stones and Treasures

- Imagine that you are one of the people in the crowd on the evening of the angel's visit. What burden or lament would you spit out? How has this problem shaped your life?

- How would the angel describe your trouble?
- Describe your jewel that the angel places on the tree.

Peace That Lasts

- In the opening of this story, the Buddha admonishes the monks and advises them not to cling to thoughts of past harm. Think of a time when you held a grudge. What was the result? What, if anything, did you gain? What, if anything, did you lose?
- What are your thoughts on Dighiti's advice to "Be not short-sighted. Be not long-sighted. Hatred is not quenched by hatred; hatred is only appeased by love"? In what situation can you apply this motto in your own life? How about beyond your life? Can you think of a circumstance which could benefit from having these words applied to it?

The Rich Man and the Shoemaker

- The characters in this story evoke strong feelings. Toward which character do you feel the most sympathetic? Do you identify with any one character in particular?
- The revelation of the true nature of the rich man surprises the rabbi and alters his perception of the rich man. Imagine that you are one of the people in the village who learns that the despised rich man has helped you. How would you feel? What would you say?
- Does this story remind you of anything that has happened in your own life? Describe that situation.
- While this story has many themes, describe the one that is most obvious to you. Now describe one that seems more subtle. How are these themes related? How are they different? In what ways does developing a theme for the story alter your understanding of it?

The Spirit of the Rice Fields

- Batara Guru expresses his desire to protect Tisna Wati through both fear and anger. Explore the relationship between fear and anger. Think of a time in your life when fear or anger, or both, caused you to act impulsively. In what ways were you like Batara Guru? How were you different?

- Imagine a different ending for this story. In the new version, what would be different? What is gained from that change? What is lost?

The Squire's Party

- The fashion, cosmetic, and advertising industries spend huge amounts of time and billions of dollars to convince us of the importance of appearances. How prevalent is the concern with appearances in this story?
- Explore the relationship between perception of ourselves and how others perceive us. How is the way Patrick reacted to the treatment he received when he arrived at the party the first time, different from the way you might have reacted in the same situation?
- Add more details to the story. How do you think the squire responded to Patrick's comments at the end of the story? What did the rest of the partygoers think?

Daniel's Legacy

- Which of the characters in this story remind you of someone in your life? What qualities do you admire in that person?
- There are many poignant encounters between the characters in this story. What feelings do these meetings evoke? When Simon finds Daniel? When Daniel and Lila are reunited? When Daniel meets Samuel?
- Imagine that you are returning to your home after having been away for a long time. What are the things you would miss the most? Who would you like to see waiting for you?
- Imagine you are Lila. How would this experience have changed you?

The Junkyard Refuge

- Discuss the images of sharing. What types of sharing do you see?
- What purposes do the character of the white-haired lady serve? What does Will learn from her? What can you?
- Sanctuary is an important theme in this story. We often seek the shelter of special friends or places in times of difficulty. Think of

a place that has offered you retreat in a time of struggle. What made it special?

- Describe a friend you turn to when you have problems. Which of their qualities eases your burden?

The Gift

- Which character in this story are you most like? Who are you least like?
- The farmer is able to see extraordinary beauty in ordinary things, even a simple apple. If you found a treasure of this kind, with whom would you share it? What qualities does that person possess which make you want to share your treasure with them?
- What is something ordinary that you find beauty in? What do you gain by sharing it with others?
- In what ways do you take the time to appreciate life's simple blessings? If you don't, how could you?

A Mother's Quest

- The mother in this story receives help and guidance from many people. Which of the helpers do you find most comforting? What about that character appeals to you?
- Describe your ideal guide. What characteristics would they possess? What would they look like? Who in your life is like this character?
- Describe the characteristics of the many guides and helpers in this story. What similarities do you notice? How does this observation contribute to your interpretation of the story?

The Miser

- The miser keeps his gold hidden and chooses not to use it or share it with anyone else. Which of your treasures, perhaps your time, talent, or stories, do you keep hidden? Why?
- Think of a time when you shared a piece of your treasure with someone else. What did you gain from this experience? How did you feel?

- What advice would you give the miser if you met him before all his gold was stolen? What would you say to him after it was gone?

Mary McPhee and the Pooka

- Much of the charm of this story lies in its magical images. Imagine a magical adventure of your own. Would you fly into the air? Swim to the bottom of the ocean? Burrow beneath the roots of a great tree? Find hidden treasure?
- What is the theme of your adventure? What do you discover? Do you find hope at the top of a mountain? Peace on the ocean's floor?
- What does Mary find as a result of her encounter with the Pooka?

This Too Shall Pass

- The ruler in this story searches for a guiding principle to help him achieve balance in his life, dismissing several elaborate suggestions in favor of a simple motto. What sources in your life provide direction and guidance?
- What simple motto do you live by?
- If you don't have a motto, think of one that summarizes how you live your life. In what ways is your motto helpful? How could changing it alter your outlook?

A Neighbor's Wisdom

- In this story, Wei Liang says, "It's as if every prospect contains a good seed and a bad seed. You never know which will grow. Sometimes, I think it's just a matter of how we look at it." Think of a difficult time or event in your life. Can you describe anything positive that came out of that experience? What did you learn?
- In what ways have your responses to seemingly negative situations been like Michael's when he first lost his job?