

CROSSING THE TRACKS: GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Everyone in the story has his or her own tracks to cross in life. What challenges do Iris, Mrs. Nesbitt, Dot, Celeste, Iris's father, Marie and Dr. Nesbitt need overcome? Do they accomplish this or not?
2. Interpret the other metaphors in the story: getting out from under a coffin (or a bed), wearing the proper shoes for every occasion, dusting and polishing people and things, reverse leather - suede, the goddess life, beating the train, etc.
3. How do the four men in the story - Iris's father, Leroy, Cecil, and Dr. Nesbitt regard women? In what ways does each man affect Iris's self-confidence?
4. What do you think Iris's father is running from?
5. How would you have intervened (or not) in Dot's situation? How would you today?
6. Iris ditches her prissy boots on the train, coaxes Ruthie out from under the bed and hits Dot with an egg. What are Iris's other acts of strength and independence – both quiet and bold. How do they evolve throughout the summer?
7. How is the Deet's household like a Greek tragedy?
8. Who are the members of Iris's family? How do they change? In what ways does the story challenge the traditional definition of family? What ingredients are needed to cultivate a family?
9. What character do you relate to or like the most? Which character's future are you most curious about?
10. How does choice affect our reaction to a person's leaving? How would you answer Iris's question: "Is it harder to have your mama die or just disappear?"
11. What are the challenges to young women who grow up without mothers?
12. Discuss these different causes of death in the story –illness, violence, flirting with death, accident, natural causes, war, suicide, and old age. How do the various types of death differently affect the living?
13. Mrs. Nesbitt regrets that she turned her angel (Morris) into a ghost. How did she do this?

14. What spiritual ideas does the book propose regarding how to live day-to-day and how to understand life after death?
15. Compare the themes - finding a home, the need for family, the need to have someone's undivided attention, love and loyalty, dealing with grief and loss, and facing domestic violence, to today's world.
16. How are we all hobos – homeward bound?