

A Little Gumbo in Her Face

Study Guide

1. In *A Little Gumbo in Her Face*, Arleen Faustina writes about Manon's inner journey from brokenness to wholeness. Manon is a strong professional woman in a powerful position at University Hospital. Yet she's tormented inside. How can a person project such strength and confidence in the work world yet harbor insecurity and emotional pain in private? How does Manon navigate between her work persona and her personal one?
2. Andy is a deceptively complex character. When you first meet him, he's dancing tango. Then you discover that he's an FBI Agent. In the scene at Drago's he stuns the women when he says, "Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers, 'Grow! Grow' ". What does this tell us about him? Why do you think Andy's therapist said this to him? What do you think about his statement?
3. Andy comments to himself that Loretta provides a good balance for Manon. Why do you think he says this? Do you agree?
4. What part does Maria play in the book? Do you consider her to be a good friend to Manon? Is her style too abrupt or does it define who Maria is? How do you prefer your friends to react to you?
5. Beatrice is a delightful character who provides emotional stability to Manon. How would you describe their relationship? How important is Beatrice to Manon's well-being?
6. How do the letters that Andy and Manon wrote serve to drive the energy of the book?
7. One of the themes in the book is the importance of family and place in our lives. How does Manon respond to the places she's lived, New York and New Orleans? Do you find that New Orleans is special, perhaps different from other cities in the U.S.?
8. Love takes both Manon and Andy by surprise. How does Andy respond? Why, at first, does Manon deny her feelings for Andy? How would you respond to finding love in your mid-forties?
9. How does tango serve as a symbol of events in the book?
10. Manon loses her parents. Andy loses his wife. Describe the different ways each character deals with her/his loss. Does the loss ever define the character or does the character grow and learn from the loss?
11. Of the secondary characters in the book which one or ones do you find most authentic and why?
12. Manon quotes Alexander Graham Bell in her letter to Andy. "When one door closes, another door opens; but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us." What do you think about this statement?
13. In the scene at Audubon Park, much attention is given to the dance of the black-bellied whistling ducks. Why do you think that is? The author describes this scene as Manon's watershed moment. What does that mean? How important is this moment to Manon's growth and healing? Have you ever experienced such a moment?
14. The author leaves the unveiling of Celeste's secret to the very end of the book. What do you think about this? Do you remember the days before the Civil Rights Movement in America? What do you think about Celeste's decision to pursue her dream? What about her family's decision to preserve her secret? And now, how do you think Manon will react in the days to come?