

Kate Braverman's *A Good Day for Seppuku*, published by City Lights, February 2018

Reading Guide

1. What kind of tone do you think Braverman's title sets for her book? What images, feelings, and understandings does it invoke? How can it be understood within the context of each short story? Why do you think Braverman chose the act of *seppuku*, specifically, to represent her book?
2. What effect does Braverman's diction have on the tone of her stories? Would you classify her writing as poetry or prose? Why?
3. The main characters of Braverman's stories are, for the most part, upper-middle- and high-class, many of them from emotionally unsupportive homes. Why do you think her stories center around this identity?
4. Braverman's stories are described as "tableaus of American family life." Do you think this is an accurate descriptor? Why or why not?
5. In *O'Hare Airport*, Braverman sets up readers to think that the protagonist will find solace in living with her father, yet we see otherwise. What do you think she is looking for?
6. In *What the Lilies Know*, a daughter in academia pursues her estranged mother. In *Skinny Broads with Wigs*, a mother in academia pursues her estranged daughter. How does the inverse relationship between the pursuer and the pursued of both stories give insight to one another?
7. How would you compare the mother-daughter relationships explored throughout Braverman's stories? How is each estrangement characterized and developed? What is the culmination of each broken relationship?
8. Consider the husband-wife dynamics in *Cocktail Hour* and *The Professor's Wife*. How are they similar, and in what key ways do they differ?
9. In *Cocktail Hour*, do you think Chloe will ultimately leave her husband, or will she stay? Why?
10. The dynamic between the protagonist and Clarissa in *Women of the Ports* is unique in that it is the only relationship portrayed in the stories that is not spousal or familial. What unique perspective does this offer against the backdrop of Braverman's entire collection?
11. Throughout *The Professor's Wife*, readers are given an increasingly escalated understanding of Patricia's unhappy marriage to Malcolm. How does Braverman build up to the dire conclusion? What details throughout the story foreshadow its end?
12. *The Professor's Wife* and *A Good Day for Seppuku* seem to share the same universe, as the two stories have a number of characters in common. How do the references to each character from story to story inform your understanding of them? What do you make of Patricia's (*The Professor's Wife*) interest in missing women and the fact that Tommy's mother (*A Good Day for Seppuku*) runs away from home?
13. What is the role of the father figure in *A Good Day for Seppuku*? How do the Captain, Sheriff Murphy, and Horace influence Tommy's childhood and growth?