

Autobiography of a Face Reading Guide

1. *Autobiography of a Face* has been widely adopted in high school and college curriculums. Do you think that this book would be appropriate for younger audiences -- such as junior high, or sixth graders -- to help them understand the feelings of sick and handicapped kids and to teach them the importance of a kind word?
2. As a child, Lucy lives in three worlds: the hospital, her home, and the outside world. How do the people in each of these environments treat her? How does Lucy respond to them?
3. "We were taken to another floor with a playroom that boasted a large, ornate dollhouse, a real collector's item probably donated by some well-meaning person. You could only look at it from behind a glass partition, but it was too nice to be played with anyway. Sometimes you'd see a child standing there, staring, but for the most part the giant miniature house, despite its prominent position near the door, was ignored" (page 40). Do you think Lucy tells her readers about the dollhouse to describe her own loneliness? Or do you think Lucy craves a picture perfect place in which to hide and be left alone?
4. The author remembers the first time she grasped the severity of her disease: "Someone dated an event as something that had happened 'before Lucy had cancer.' Shocked, I looked up. 'I had cancer?'" (page 43). Do you remember a time in your life where you were surprised to find out something about yourself that everyone else already knew?
5. After Lucy's second chemotherapy treatment, her mother scolds her: "She went on to explain how disappointed she was that I'd cried even before Dr. Woolf had put the needle into me, that crying was only because of fear, that I shouldn't be afraid... As I made my way downstairs to my room, I resolved to never cry again" (page 78-79). How does this scene make you feel about Lucy's mom? Do you think, overall, that she is a good mother to Lucy?

6. Her father can't bear to confront her sickness, often leaving her alone during her chemotherapy treatments: "I watched his back as he left and felt relief, because his embarrassment and awkwardness caused me as much pain as they did him. There was no blame in those moments, no regrets, no accusations, not even despair" (page 84-85). Do you think that Lucy is harder on her mother than she is on her father in this memoir? If so, why do you think that is?
7. "Being different was my cross to bear, but being aware of it was my compensation. When I was younger, before I'd gotten sick, I'd wanted to be special, to be different. Did this then make me the creator of my own situation?" (page 101). Do you think Lucy, like many children do, blames herself for her sickness and, as a result, her disfigurement? Does she believe that she deserves her fate?
8. Young Lucy is tormented by other kids, mostly male: "'That is the ugliest girl I have ever seen.' I knew in my heart that their comments had nothing to do with me, that it was all about them appearing tough and cool to their friends" (page 124-125). Were you surprised at her level of maturity and reasoning? Or do you see this is an example of a defense mechanism -- distancing herself from the situation in order to hide the hurt?
9. In the hospital bathroom, someone scratched "Be Here Now" into the door. This message has a significant meaning to Lucy later on in the book. Discuss.
10. The struggle between truth and beauty is prevalent throughout Lucy's memoir: "I had put a great deal of effort into accepting that my life would be without love and beauty in order to be comforted by Love and Beauty. Did my eager willingness to grasp the idea of "fixing" my face somehow invalidate all those years of toil?" (page 157-158). How would you answer Lucy's question?
11. Does Lucy's death change your feelings about this book? How?

Adapted from www.readinggroupguides.com