



Songs in Ordinary Time

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Discussion Questions

1. Omar Duvall is known to the reader as a dishonest and potentially dangerous man. Why do you think the people of Atkinson are drawn to such a reprehensible figure? What does he offer people like Marie, Benjy, Harvey Klubock, and Bernadette Mansaw? Why do these characters refuse to accept the truth about him, even when it's clearly evident that he has lied to them?
2. How do you feel about the character of Marie Fermoye? Given the circumstances she's had to face—the breakup of her marriage to the heir of a prominent family, the economic hardships she's endured, the scrutinizing eyes of neighbors and other members of the community—can you sympathize with her actions towards her children, Oman Duvall, and her ex-husband?
3. Although most of the novel's characters are flawed, few of them are truly malevolent. Discuss, for instance, Renie LaChance's telephone calls to women, Sonny Stoner's affair with Eunice, Father Gannon's affair with Alice, Robert Haddad's Thievery, and Sam's alcoholism. What do these characters—and their failings—have in common? What compels them in their actions?
4. What do Joey Sheldon and his popcorn stand represent to the novel and/or to the town of Atkinson? Why do you think people feel so strongly about Joey, one way or the other?
5. How does Morris use humor to offset the darker events of the novel? Do her humorous passages make you more sympathetic toward characters such as Omar Duvall, Jarden Greene, or Astrid Haddad?
6. Why do you think Norm, who had been Omar Duvall's greatest detractor, is taken in by the soap-selling scheme? How does Omar manage to manipulate Norm's feelings about him, and why, eventually, does he fail?
7. What does Father Gannon mean when he tells Alice, "I realize that my faith has become a wholeness. It's a unity of mind and soul. And flesh ... I finally feel like a real priest!" Do you think he really loves Alice? What does she give him and what in turn does he offer her?
8. Omar insists that he truly loves Marie, despite all the ways in which he has deceived her. Do you believe him? Do you believe his involvement with the Fermoye family has changed him? What clues does Morris offer—especially in the final scene involving Oman, Norm, and Benjy—that affects your feelings either way?
9. How does the concept of salvation figure in the novel? Which characters can't be saved from their own desperate acts, and which are trying desperately to save themselves?
10. What do you think the future holds for Marie Fermoye and her family? How has the presence of Oman Duvall changed each of them, as well as their relationships with each other?