

Discussion Guide for “The Gathering” Analysis

Objective:

This discussion guide is designed to facilitate conversations around the themes of loneliness, isolation, inauthenticity, and the courage to connect, as portrayed in the provided script. The guide encourages participants to solely reflect on the characters’ experiences, explore their motivations, and relate the scenarios to broader social and personal contexts.

Introduction (5-10 minutes)

1. Opening Remarks:

- Watch the production
- Identify and discuss the central themes
- Explain the purpose of the discussion to explore the characters’ emotions, motivations, and the broader social issues that influence their lives.
- Encourage open and respectful dialogue, reminding participants that the discussion is a safe space to share thoughts and feelings.

2. Initial Impressions

- Ask participants for their immediate reactions to the production.
 - What stood out to them about the characters and their situations?
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Character Analysis (20-30 minutes)

1. Jackie

- Jackie states, “Technology is already way ahead of so many of us.” How is Jackie’s focus on technology related to the themes of aging and loneliness?
- Jackie says, “All of my old haunts are gone.” Discuss how this relates to loss of connection with her community.

2. Marie

- Marie tells the other characters that they are “lucky” to live in an area where they have access to technology and activities, stating that the churches and community centers in her area ignore older people. How does geography relate to the theme of isolation in Marie’s case?
- Marie ponders why there are no longer intergenerational gatherings for LGBTQ people. Discuss how this loss of connection to younger people affects older generations.

3. Annalise

- When talking with Earlene, Annalise tells a story about caring for her mother with dementia. How does she relate this story to Earlene’s situation with losing her partner?
- Annalise tells Earlene that she shouldn’t beat herself up for the decisions that she made, and that it is okay to change her mind about her living arrangements. Discuss ways that acknowledging when things are not working out can help combat isolation.

4. Sandra

- What is Sandra’s relationship to technology and how is that related to the theme of loneliness?
- Sandra states that she feels embarrassment at not knowing how to do things. Discuss how self consciousness like this can lead to isolation.
- Sandra depends on her friend group, particularly Jackie, to help her with things she does not understand how to do. Discuss ways that social connection can help to fill the skill gaps that may be experienced by older people.

5. Earlene

- The scene opens with the other characters trying to decide if they should go outside to talk to Earlene. What does this say about the loneliness associated with the loss of a partner?
- Earlene talks about her experiences with her “new place.” What sort of issues does she have with her new place, and what does this say about the experience of aging and loneliness?

Thematic Exploration (15-20 minutes)

1. Technology

- What role does changing technology play in these characters’ lives, how does it add to their isolation, and what ways are they trying to reach beyond this isolation?

2. Geographical or Residential Isolation

- Both Earlene and Marie talk about how their place of residence makes them feel isolated. Discuss the ways that residential isolation affects the characters, and the ways that they are attempting to overcome that isolation.

2. Intergeneration Loneliness:

- How does intergenerational loneliness add to the loneliness of the characters?
 - Discuss ways that communities could combat the loneliness caused by intergenerational isolation.
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Relating to Broader Context (10-15 minutes)

1. Community and Support:

- How do the characters depend on each other for support? What ways are they helping each other to overcome barriers to support?
- What roles does support (or lack thereof) from friends, family, and community play in the characters' lives?

2. Personal Reflections

- Invite participants to share if they can relate to any of the characters' experiences. How have they dealt with similar challenges?
 - What steps can individuals take in their own lives to overcome loneliness and be more authentic in their relationships?
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Conclusion (5-10 minutes)

1. Closing Thoughts:

- Summarize the key points discussed and invite any final reflections.
- Encourage participants to think about how they can apply insights from the discussion to their own lives and communities.

2. Next Steps:

- Offer resources or suggest further readings on the topics discussed

- If appropriate, invite participants to continue the conversation in a follow-up session or in other settings

This guide is intended to encourage thoughtful and empathetic conversations, helping participants to engage deeply with their characters' struggles and triumphs, and to connect to these fictional experiences to real world challenges.