

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

by Betty Smith

Discussion Questions

1. In a particularly revealing chapter, Francie's teacher dismisses her essays about everyday life among the poor as 'sordid,' and many characters seem to harbor a sense of shame about their poverty. Yet they also display a remarkable self-reliance. How and why have our society's perceptions of poverty changed - for better or worse - during the last one hundred years?
2. Some critics argue that many characters can be dismissed as stereotypes. Is this a fair criticism? Which characters are the most convincing? The least?
3. Francie observes that women seem to hate other women, while men, even if they hate each other, stick together against the world. Is this accurate in the novel?
4. The women in the Nolan/Rommely clan exhibit much of the strength and, whenever possible, control the family's destiny. In what ways does Francie continue this legacy?
5. What might Francie's obsession with order - from reading the library A through Z to trying every flavor ice cream soda - say about her circumstances and her dreams?
6. Although written in the third person, the narrative is largely from Francie's point of view. How would the book differ if told from Neeley's perspective?
7. How can modern readers reconcile the anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant sentiments that characters espouse throughout the novel?
8. Could it be argued that the main character is not Francie but Brooklyn itself?