Family

The following selections explore the complicated role that family plays in determining our identities, be they distant relatives remembered through history or the immediate families we live with each day.

“The Ink That Gives the White Page a Meaning” – Amma Ababio, pg. 15
“Harriet Faid” – Connie Amoroso, pg. 18
“Ghost Dance” – Rachel Belloma, pg. 23
“My Father Tries to Bond With Me” – Jonathan deVries, pg. 52
“Dusty Memories” – Lauren Hirata, pg. 89

Amma Ababio’s “The Ink that Gives the White Page a Meaning” recounts Ababio’s experience immigrating to the United States as child and how learning about her family helped her learn about the country she’d left behind. In “Harriet Faid,” Connie Amoroso attempts to connect to her late great-great-grandmother, the memory of whom had been erased from the family history, while Rachel Belloma’s “Ghost Dance” explores a family history marked by remembrance and forgetting complicated by the fact that one side of her family tree is responsible the historic erasure of the other. In “Dusty Memories,” Lauren Hirata shares the experience of visiting the Japanese internment camp where her grandmother was detained during WWII and reflects on what it means to be a Japanese-American then and now. Finally, in “My Father Tries to Bond With Me,” Jonathan deVries expresses uncertainty over his relationship to his family after his father attempts to engage him in a racist conversation.
Questions for Group Discussion

- How does family influence the way we think about ourselves, our identities, and our cultures?
- What kinds of familial tensions are visible in these works? How do they affect the authors?
- How do the authors in these works describe remembrance and forgetting in relationship to family and family histories? Why are some people and histories remembered, and why are some forgotten?
- In what ways do family histories relate to or reflect larger, political histories? How does this inform the way we think of family? Of politics?

Writing Prompt

Part of the process of becoming an adult involves deciding for ourselves how we feel about various issues, as opposed to simply accepting our family's attitudes toward those issues. In examining your family background and your family's views on other issues dealt with in this anthology—race, gender, class, etc.—what viewpoints do you continue to share with your family, and on what issues do you differ? Are there parts of your family history you are proud of? Ashamed of? Write about an incident in your family history, or something that has occurred more recently involving your life directly, which has affected your sense of identity either positively or negatively.