Relationships

The following selections examine the ways in which difference affects our interpersonal relationships, both romantic and platonic. The relationships described in these selections are sometimes troubled, often revelatory.

“Soljah” – Casey Artz, pg. 20
“My First Best Friend” – Arica L. Hayes, pg. 84
“Black and White Playground” – Dana Horton, pg. 95
“Letters” – Leo Johnson, pg.
“Yoko” – Sally Mao, pg.

Casey Artz’s “Soljah” expresses the nervous joy that comes with being accepted into a new—and different—friend group. In “My First Best Friend,” Arica L. Hayes recounts the social pressures that put tension on her relationship with her childhood best friend, while Dana Horton’s “Black and White Playground” describes the way in which her cousin and her cousin’s boyfriend navigate the social and familial disapproval over their interracial relationship. In “Letters,” Leo Johnson reminisces about a childhood friendship turned unreciprocated crush complicated by both race and sexuality. Finally, Sally Mao’s “Yoko” expresses regret over not befriending a half-Japanese classmate during her childhood in Hunan, China.
Questions for Group Discussion

• Many of these selections explore the difficulty of building and/or maintaining cross-cultural relationships. What are some of the difficulties that these authors describe?
• Hayes, Horton, and Mao all describe situations in which family and social pressure discourages interracial/intercultural relationships. How do these authors or the people they describe navigate these pressures?
• What are the benefits of cross-cultural relationships, as described by the authors and from your own personal experience?

Writing Prompt

Who we choose as friends and who chooses us as friends—these are complicated choices, particularly when we are children. Do most of your friends come from backgrounds similar to your own, or do you have a more diverse group of friends? Have you ever hidden a friendship from family or other friends, or had limitations placed on a friendship based on external forces driven by lack of cross-cultural understanding? Write about a friendship that has been influenced positively or negatively by larger cultural forces.