

Discussion Topics for *How Not to Cry in Public & Other Victories* by Jean Stringam

- Have you ever had the problem of crying at inopportune moments? What was your experience when you tried Brenna's method for avoiding tears?

- Brenna longs for a relationship with her mother and finds many ways to fill this void in her life. Evaluate the outcomes and what she might have done differently.

- Brenna wonders for years why her mother sent her to live with her Uncle Douglas. Trace the evolution of her understanding as she learns more about her mother.

- How does Brenna's fifth-grade debacle help her connect with her Uncle's troubles? In what ways are the two events similar and different?

- Several characters express their views on the topic of self-esteem. Evaluate their reasoning and explain what you believe is the best view.

- In Brenna's search to locate and meet her relatives she makes mistakes and encounters success. Are there other ways she could have approached this project?

- Humiliation isn't something another person can do to you; humiliation is a consequence of something you've done. To find the source of Douglas's sense of humiliation, how would you sort out the difficult relationships he has with his twin brother Marc, and their father, William Walker, Sr.? How do the value systems of the three men differ?

- At various times Brenna hides from the world by sleeping for days. Using the above definition of humiliation, is that what she feels? What would be a more accurate descriptor for her emotional state?

- What is Uncle Richard's view of life in a big family? Compare it to Brenna's. What is your experience?

- Brenna makes her first discoveries about boys during this traumatic year, both as to friendship and romance. What does she learn in the process?

For those who'd like to do a little research:

- As you discover the true relationships in the Walker family, create a three-generation family tree. Keep all your drafts. (The family tree you draft at the beginning of the book may change wildly by the time you reach the end.)

- What do you know about your own family? You may find it connects you to people of an historical era in a wonderfully personal way. Print off a genealogical chart from the Internet and complete as much as you can. Ask your oldest relatives to help you finish filling it in. What are the blank spots in your personal family search? (Suggestion: Try an Online search at a site such as www.familysearch.org).