



Discussion Questions for *The Latecomers* by Helen Klein Ross

1. THE LATECOMERS encapsulates both the sweep of a century of American history and small moments as people live through historical events. How do historical events and personal histories intersect in the novel? At which points do these intersections most impact the characters' storylines?
2. How would Bridey's life have been different if she'd been born 50 years later, in 1942? 100 years later in 1992?
3. How do you think Sarah would be different if her older brother had lived? What if she'd been the youngest daughter instead of the oldest?

4. What made Nettie stop talking after Sarah's brother died? Why didn't the family insist that Nettie continue her schooling?
5. How does Ross comment on race and gender roles in the various eras? Which characters challenge those roles and how?
6. In writing this novel, Ross jumps back and forth in time. Why? What is gained by this method and what is lost?
7. How would Bridey's life be different if Thom had lived?
8. When Bridey decides to give up her son for adoption, she "felt desperate to mark him." Why does she feel this way?
9. Do you think Sarah was justified in urging Bridey to give up her child?
10. What role does religion play in Bridey's life? In Sarah's?
11. What is gained when young and old generations connect, as Vincent does with his grandfather? What is lost when they fail to connect, as with Vincent and his father?
12. How does the relationship between Bridey and Sarah change over the course of the book?
13. Do you think Sarah's adopting Vincent was fortunate for Bridey, or not? In what ways did Vincent benefit from his adoption? In what ways did he suffer because of it?
14. If you were Vincent's parent, how would you raise him differently?
15. Why do you think Bridey, a devout Catholic, didn't try harder to convert Vincent to Catholicism?
16. When Bridey returns to Ireland, how has she changed? How has she remained the same?
17. If you were born in Sarah and Bridey's day, what would you miss most about living in the present? What would you most appreciate?
18. Ross dramatizes the first sexual experiences of three young women: Bridey, Sarah and Emma. How are their experiences different? How are they the same?

19. Describe the dynamic between Sarah and her husband Edmund. How does it change before marriage and after. How is their relationship perceived by their granddaughter Ruth who finds Edmund's letters years after he wrote them?
20. How does Ross portray Edmund's mother as an unsympathetic character?
21. When Ruth brings Connie home from boarding school, why does Bea react as she does?
22. When Vincent discovers the secret of his origin, what explains his reaction? Why doesn't he share his discovery with his daughter and granddaughter?
23. How would Vincent's life have been different if he'd been born a girl?
24. How is Emma like Ruth was as a teenager? How is she different? Do you recognize anything of Bridey or Vincent in Emma?
25. How do you think Emma reacts to receiving the email in the last chapter?