

Going on Nine

Book Club Discussion Questions

By Catherine Underhill Fitzpatrick

1. Grace Mitchell is meant to embody many of the aspects of a child of eight (going on nine). What examples from the story illustrate her personal strengths? And her vulnerabilities?
2. Going on Nine is told from two perspectives: the adult Grace looking back on the summer of 1956, and the child Grace experiencing it. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this dual-timeline format? In what ways would the story have been different if it were told only from the child's viewpoint?
3. Except for three chapters, the entire story takes place on Thistle Way, a quiet neighborhood in a suburb of St. Louis. Why do you think the author chose this location?
4. Going on Nine is imbued with a sense of time. The Fifties is a fabled era in the communal memory, but one that, in reality, was as flawed as any other. Give examples from the story that illustrate this.
5. At the beginning of the summer, Grace yearns to live with a family that's "better" than her own. Give examples of how the Mitchells are, in fact, a pretty terrific family.
6. Each stop along Grace's journey is a story unto itself, peopled with characters in turning-point situations. Which character or family did you find most memorable and why? Which characters or families does Grace discover are different from how the neighbors of Thistle Way perceive them?
7. Several chapters deal with sensitive and even tragic events. How do think these events affected the story, which is essentially sweet and nostalgic?
8. In the end, Grace comes to realize that the place she belongs—the place she wants to be—is with her own wonderful family. In a coming-of-age novel, we more or less expect this. What revelations in the Epilogue did you not expect?
- 9) At age eight, going on nine, Grace had mastered the art of making excuses for her behavior. In several instances, the adult Grace acknowledges that, ruefully. "It was not my finest hour," she says at one point. Did Going on Nine bring back remembrances of your own childhood? Does the long lens of time afford a clearer view about that period of your life?

10. Many novelists draw on their personal observations and experiences in developing plots and characters. In the Author's Note, Catherine Underhill Fitzpatrick mentions that a few aspects of Grace's life seem to track with her own childhood. What are the risks in writing a novel that reads like a memoir? How is this different from writing an autobiography? A biography?

(Content courtesy of the author.)