

Clock Dance by Anne Tyler Discussion Questions

1. What was your initial take of the passenger who threatens Willa on the airplane: "This is a gun, and it's loaded. Move and I shoot"? Why might Anne Tyler have incorporated the plane incident—placing it early on—in the novel? What does it reveal, if anything, about Willa's character? Do you wish Tyler had returned to it... or done more with it?
2. Talk about Willa's relationship with her histrionic mother and her mild-mannered father? How have her parents' personalities shaped Willa's own personality and approach to life?
3. What makes Willa agree to head to Baltimore in order to take care of almost complete strangers?
4. Talk about the bond that develops between Willa and nine-year-old-soon-to-be-double-digit-Cheryl and Cheryl's mother, Denise, who has no difficulty depending on Willa's generosity. And how is Willa's personality perfectly shaped to fall in with this little family of two?
5. Willa confides to Denise that, while she's not asked him, she hoped her son would have offered to pick her up before dinner. Denise responds with "But why just hope? Why do you go at things so slantwise?" What does Denise mean—and where else does Willa "go at things slantwise"?
6. Discuss how Willa's real family treats her, especially, say, her son Sean?
7. A neighbor tells Willa: "Figuring out what to live for. That's the great problem at my age." Care to unpack that statement, say, in terms of this novel or in terms of real life (maybe even your own)?
8. What does Willa find—in life and within herself—in Baltimore?
9. In her review of *Clock Dance*, Julie Myerson of the UK's *Guardian* writes that Anne Tyler is an author "who focuses so unapologetically on the quotidian ache of human experience." What do you think that observation means, and how might it apply to Tyler's novels—not only this latest but also her earlier novels (if you've read any)?
10. The book's title, "Clock Dance," comes from the game young Cheryl plays with two friends. What might the thematic significance of the title be?
11. The plot of *Clock Dance* contains little in the way of conflict. Did you find that refreshing, even a bit of a relief? Were you engaged as you read the book? Or did you find the novel's lack of conflict and suspense uninteresting?