

The Charm Bracelet

By Viola Shipman

Reading Group Questions

1. *The Charm Bracelet* was written as a tribute to the author's grandmothers – whose charm bracelets and lessons inspired the novel – as well as to all of our elders. Do you think we respect our elders – their lives, stories and sacrifices – as much as we used to in the past? Why or why not? Talk about specific instances in the book where Lauren and Arden honored Lolly? Discuss instances in your life or the lives of others where elders haven't been shown the respect they deserve?
2. *The Charm Bracelet* focuses on the lives and relationships of three generations of women in one family. Do you see parallels of Lolly, Arden and Lauren in your own family? Discuss how the decisions and choices you've made – or those made by your mother, grandmother or daughter – have affected your family, either positively or negatively.
3. Do you have a charm bracelet? Do you collect charms? Do you have charms from your family? Discuss where you got some of them and what they mean to you. Do you collect any other heirloom items? What are they and what stories do they tell/memories do they provide? What other collections do you have from your family (dishes, hope chest, recipes, etc.)? What do they mean to you? Will you pass them on to your daughters or granddaughters? And were any of these traditions that were started by your grandmother or a female family figure?
4. There are many examples of love that Lolly, Arden and Lauren exemplify in *The Charm Bracelet*: Familial love, lost love, new love, love of place, love of work and love of home. Discuss those. What is your greatest "love" and why? Do you have any love regrets?
5. *The Charm Bracelet* was inspired by the stories – the oral history – of the author's grandmothers and family. In numerous passages, Lolly tells Arden to put down her phone, or for Lauren to stop texting and call a friend instead. In addition, Arden's career seems to spotlight our societal thirst for celebrity gossip and instant news. In contrast, Lolly tells stories via the charms of the family's history, generational tales that would be lost if she didn't share them. Do you think we are losing our collective family "heirloom" histories (i.e., that of telling family stories, sharing our family heirlooms)? If so, what will be the consequences to future generations? If not, why? And what are you doing to preserve those traditions?
6. If there was one story or lesson from your life that you could share with a younger family member – a child, a grandchild, a niece or nephew, or a cousin – what would it be? What story or stories do you want to be sure to share and pass along in your life? And with whom?
7. If you had a chance to ask a grandparent or elder something about his or her life, what would it be?
8. Arden desires to be a writer, while Lauren wants to be a painter. Neither are easy, stable career paths. Have you ever given up pursuing a passion because "life" got in the way, or because it didn't seem logical? How did that impact you, and does it still? Do you think most of us are ruled by fear in our lives? Or is that "just life"? Talk about a job that you stayed at – but didn't like – because you felt you had no other options.
9. *The Charm Bracelet* seeks to remind readers of what's truly most important in life in these hectic – often troubling – times: Family, faith, friends, fun and a passion for life and what you do. Do you think in our busy world today that we have forgotten what's most important? Why or why not? And how do you and your family try to focus on reminding yourselves of those simple yet grand gifts (i.e., Sunday dinners, no cell phones at dinner, family trips to the same place, etc.)?
10. Has anyone in your family or life been diagnosed with dementia? Discuss how that has impacted them, you and your life.
11. Do you and your family – and those in your book club – have a special place that you return to every year? Discuss what that place means to you?
12. There is a contrast in *The Charm Bracelet* that is drawn between life in an urban area and more rural/resort area? What are the pros and cons of both?
13. Lolly, Arden and Lauren are all strong, independent women and characters. Talk about some of the strong, independent women in your life and what they mean/have meant to you. And discuss how women are portrayed today not only in fiction but also in the media.