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A Day Late, A Dollar Short by Terry McMillan

Discussion Questions used at SPL February -- 2012

1. Have you read much Terry McMillan before? This is one of her earlier works . . . have you seen growth in her writing?
2. She put a lot of drama in this book . . . which if I remember from *Waiting to Exhale* and *Stella*, that's pretty typical of her . . . did you like it? Was there too much?
3. She told her story in all the characters voices . . . could you tell who was who in each chapter? Why do you think she didn't put their names on the chapter titles? Do you like having stories told to you in multiple voices? What are the strengths of doing a novel this way? The weaknesses?
4. Which character did you like best of all? Least of all?
5. Viola - what sort of woman was she? Why do you think she didn't tell her kids in person what she told them in the letters? Or did she try and they just didn't listen?
6. Cecil – what sort of man was he? What did you think of his relationship with Brenda? Did she really love him?
7. Paris – how would you describe her? What was her relationship with her son Dingus like?
8. Charlotte – why was she so prickly? What caused her unhappiness?
9. Lewis – he lacked any sense of direction . . . what's your guess why? His early abuse at the hands of his cousins? Maybe ADD, which was hinted at with one of Charlotte's daughters?
10. Janelle – was she the typical baby of the family?
11. Lots of supporting characters . . . Who caught your attention?
12. What were some of the important issues of life that McMillan touched on . . . And why do you think she included them in the book?
13. Sibling rivalry is a big issue in this book . . . Do you think it happens in everyone's family? Do we ever get over it?
14. Do you think this family will continue growing closer? What would you like to see their futures hold?
15. Addiction is another big part of the children's lives . . . Lewis with alcohol, Paris with pills and Janelle and Charlotte dulling their pain with shopping . . . Do you think we all have a tendency towards that type of behavior? What keeps us from acting on those tendencies?
16. Was it realistic that those letters from Viola made such a big difference in her children? What did the content of the letters show about Vi? Why did she make them wait 'til Thanksgiving to open the letters?
17. Would you want to receive a letter from beyond the grave? Who would you want it to be from?
18. Why do you think McMillan chose the title that she did? What do you think that phrase means? Did it apply to one character more than another?
19. This book was written almost 10 years ago, and it was set in the early 90's (I think, though I can't find it in the book now!) . . . do you think times have gotten easier for families over those periods?
20. Did you understand the relationship between Cecil and Vi . . . They loved each other but couldn't live with each other . . . how is their separation different from their daughters?

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
 - How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
 - How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
 - How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
 - Did the book hold your interest?
 - How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
 - Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
 - Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?
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A Day Late and A Dollar Short

Discussion Questions from Penguin.com.

http://www.us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/day_late_and_dollar_short.html

1. Of all the siblings, who had the toughest time growing up? Or did they all start out with more or less the same advantages and disadvantages?
2. Sexual abuse is a very harsh reality that both Lewis and Shanice suffered. What do you think Janelle can do to prevent the experience from further damaging Shanice?
3. Are there parallels between Janelle's relationship with George and Brenda's relationship with Cecil?
4. Lewis picks up lady friends easily and relies heavily upon them when he gets into trouble. To what extent is this a result of his being brought up amidst so many women?
5. Viola and Charlotte share the same birthday, a coincidence that they insist debunks the claims of astrology. Are their personalities completely different or are there characteristics that they share?
6. Paris has a very tolerant attitude about her son's sexual activity. Would she have been as liberal about contraception and abortion if Dingus had been a girl?
7. Viola doesn't have an affectionate or close relationship with either of her sisters. How does this play into her hopes for her own children and grandchildren?
8. Do you agree with Dr. Greene's assessment that Al was justified in hiding the existence of his illegitimate son from Charlotte? Why or why not?
9. Alcohol and drug addiction play a prominent role in the Price children's problems. Could the family have done more to help Lewis face up to his alcoholism and Paris, her Vicadin addiction?
10. Would Charlotte have been able to address her anger if she hadn't won the lottery?
11. Cecil claims to love Viola, even when he leaves her for Brenda. How "real" is Cecil's love? How do you feel about Viola's supportive attitude towards Cecil's relationship with Brenda?
12. In light of the turmoil each of her children is still in at the time of Viola's death, what do you think about the novel's title?