

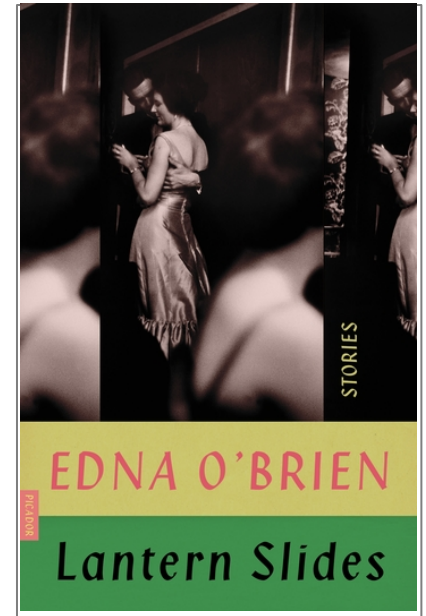
PICADOR

Discussion Guide

Lantern Slides: Stories

by Edna O'Brien

“Her stories are brilliantly realized and often very funny... O'Brien is quite simply one of the finest short story writers of our time.” —Joyce Carol Oates



ISBN: 9780374538842

ABOUT THE BOOK

A newly reissued collection of stories from the author of *Girl*, “one of the most celebrated writers in the English language” (NPR’s *Weekend Edition*)

In twelve stories peopled with deeply etched characters, whom we come to know instantly and intimately, *Lantern Slides* reveals the wit and passion of a master of the short fiction form. Rich and humorous, full of struggle and boldness, these stories are a singular reflection of Edna O’Brien’s artistry.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

“Oft in the Stilly Night”

The author utilizes the second person (you) in this story. In the opening paragraph, she directly addresses readers: “You are passing through, on your way to somewhere livelier. You would never dream of a different destiny.” The story then closes with the question: “Now I ask, what would you do?” In what ways do you think being addressed in this manner affects your reading experience? How about your impressions of this village and its inhabitants?”

Brother

How would you describe the relationship between Maisie and her brother? What emotions do you think may linger beneath the surface of Maisie’s words?

The Widow

Discuss the role of gossip in “The Widow.” In what ways do gossip and rumors shape your perspective of Bridget?

Epitaph

The narrator of “Epitaph” notes that “love is a prison.” How do you see the protagonist creating her own kind of prison via the love affair in this story?

What a Sky

Why do you think the daughter in “What a Sky” ultimately decides she cannot take her father out? How do you think you would act in this situation?

Storm

Imagine a shift in the perspective of this story. How might Mark interpret his mother’s actions? What about Penny?

Another Time

Nelly feels she needs to “get away” and travels to a seaside resort near her old home. But when she gets there, “It seemed as if the furniture of those times, and her failed marriage, and the flies in the raw wounds, and the several mistakes of her life had got jumbled together and were now hounding her, moving in on this place.” After her conversation with Gertie, however, “She felt as if doors or windows were swinging open all around her and that she was letting go of some awful affliction.” Why do you think this interaction with Gertie causes such a shift in Nelly?

A Demon

Why do you think Meg reacts to Nancy’s “diagnosis” the way that she does? What about this family’s dynamics may influence Meg’s view of her sister?

Dramas

*What do you learn about the narrator of “Dramas” through her account of Barry’s story? Do you think she is culpable in Barry’s victimization? Why or why not?

Long Distance

Consider the interpretation of love that closes the story: “Love, she thought, is like nature, but in reverse; first it fruits, then it flowers, then it seems to wither, then it goes deep, deep down into its burrow, where no one sees it, where it is lost from sight, and ultimately people die with that secret buried inside their souls.” In what ways does this assessment of love resonate with you? How does your thinking diverge?

A Little Holiday

What connections do you see between the family dynamics in “A Little Holiday” and “A Demon?” Why might the author have chosen to convey both of these stories from a child’s perspective?

Lantern Slides

How do you think the structure and pace of “Lantern Slides,” with its rapid switches in point of view, affects your impressions of these characters and their interactions at the party?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Since her debut novel, *The Country Girls*, **EDNA O'BRIEN** has written more than twenty works of fiction. She is the recipient of many awards, including the Irish PEN Lifetime Achievement Award, the American National Arts Gold Medal, and the Frank O'Connor Prize. Born and raised in the west of Ireland, she has lived in London for many years.



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