

Discussion Questions for Heating and Cooling

1. What types of love does Beth Ann Fennelly describe in Heating and Cooling? How does she depict them?
2. In “Married Love” what do we learn about the three people involved, and which of them do we learn about the most?
3. How does Fennelly recount her mother’s battle with cancer and her sister’s unexpected death throughout the collection? In “The Grief Vacation,” Fennelly chooses to write about her own experiences in third person. Why would she make this unusual choice? What is her experience of grief life, and how does it resonate with you?
4. In “Goner” the author invites us to look up the store about Father Mayer and dares us to call it fiction. Why do you think she issues that dare? Who is it addressed to?
5. Fennelly is a poet. What evidence of this do you find in her micro-memoirs? Could some or all of them be considered poems?
6. In Heating and Cooling, Fennelly notes that she is bad at remembering. Do you think this is true? How does memory feature in her vignettes? Is she a reliable narrator?
7. What roles do sex, motherhood, female identity, and feminism seem to play in Fennelly’s life? How do they co-incide or clash?
8. One of the memoirs is titled, “If You’re Born Catholic, You’ll Always Be Catholic.” What does Fennelly mean by this? Do you think this is true? Is it only true for Catholicism?
9. Why do you think Fennelly chose to interweave the three separate memoirs in “Nine Months in Madison”? What effect does this have?
10. What happens in “Our Friend the Memorist”? Why does the memorist decide against making his toast? Why do you think he is identified as “the memorist”?
11. How does Fennelly portray her younger self and her older self? How are they similar and different, and how do they relate to one another?
12. Did the format of micro-memoirs appeal to you? Did you read them one at a time or all at once? Which was your favorite vignette and why? Do you feel they all came together to form a whole?

These Reading Group Guide questions were found at the end of the book.