

Discussion Questions: Larry's Party*

1. Larry's Party is written entirely in the third person. How does this affect the tone of the book? Who do you imagine is telling Larry's story?

2. Why do you think Carol Shields presented Larry's life in episodic flashes? Does the structure of the book reflect Larry's obsession with mazes? How?

3. All of the major events in Larry's life—marriage, divorce, childbirth, job changes—are omitted from the novel. We read, in passing, that Larry has had a child. We never witness Larry actually getting divorce papers, or packing up his desk. Why do you think Carol Shields chose to do this? Do you feel it is effective? Is it true that often it isn't the actual event that bears significance, but the days, months, and years that follow?

4. In Chapter Five, titled "Larry's Words," the narrator says, "What else, really, does [Larry] need in his life but more words? When you add up the world and its words you get a kind of cosmic sandwich, two thick slices of meaning with nothing required in between." Consider the importance of words in Larry's Party. How does Larry's evolving vocabulary affect his relationships?

5. How is Larry's marriage to Dorrie unlike his marriage to Beth? How and why does Larry experience these marriages so differently? Several times the narrator refers to Larry as having left Dorrie. Is this really true? If Dorrie had not dug up Larry's garden maze, do you think that he would have resigned himself to staying in a mediocre marriage?

6. "They were about to be matter-of-factly claimed by familiar streets and houses and the life they'd chosen or which had chosen them." This theme, fate as a controlling fact in our lives, pervades Larry's Party. Are there any instances of Larry controlling his own fate, or making a precipitous decision? If not, does this make Larry a passive person, or merely a person at peace with the maze of life?

7. Do you think that the women in Larry's Party are more in control of their destinies than Larry is of his?

8. Work plays an important role in the lives of the people in Larry's Party—the most obvious example being Larry and his garden mazes. What about Dorrie and Beth? Do their jobs mirror their own personalities and the paths that their lives have taken?

9. With the exception of a few uneasy visits with Larry and Beth and reading Larry the newspaper while he was in a coma, Larry's son doesn't play a significant part in the novel. Larry's relationships with women often seem to take precedence. Is this unrealistic, or is it an unfortunate consequence of modern divorce? Do you think that Larry's son will learn more life lessons from his mother than from his father? Is Larry a good father?

10. In the final chapter, dinner conversation revolves around the question, "What's it like being a man these days?" Has Carol Shields answered this question in *Larry's Party*? Is Larry a typical man of the '90s?

11. At one point a dinner guest observes that, "at the center of the maze there's an encounter with one's self." Has Larry encountered himself yet? When?

*** from Penguin.com**