“Welcome to Water Street”

Literary Analysis
The opening story offers a litany, a list, of characteristics and attributes of Water Street, the neighborhood where the collection is set. Which specific details or passages appear to foreshadow the collection’s themes, hinting at what will later come? What, specifically, do those details or passages suggest will follow?

Personal Connections
Of the many vivid descriptions provided in this opening, with which do you most identify? Which ones feel most familiar to your own experience of growing up as part of a community in Kentucky?

“My Girl Mona: Yolanda”

Literary Analysis
As most of the stories in Water Street, “My Girl Mona” is written from a first-person point of view (POV). We, as readers, experience the world through the narrator’s perspective—Yolanda’s senses and Yolanda’s emotion. Reading closely, what are the things upon which she fixates or dwells upon throughout the story? What do these details reveal about her character and emotional state? How might those details help readers better understand her troubles and her panic attacks?

Personal Connections
Consider the long standing relationship between Mona and Yolanda. Is that relationship equally beneficial to both women? In your own life, have you ever been part of a similar relationship? If so, think of that relationship closely too. What does this relationship reveal about the other person; what does it reveal about you?

“Water Street, 1979: Junior”

Literary Analysis
This story asks readers to think more deeply about the complex issue of race relations in both 1979 and our own time. What instances of subtle or overt racism do you find in the story? What instances do you find where individuals treat each other equally or long for a better understanding of one another?

The conclusion also asks readers to rethink the preceeding story. How do Junior’s closing thoughts about his wife, Yolanda, recast or reshape how we see her and their relationship?
Personal Connections
Though this story’s setting is almost 40 years in the past, the racial tensions its characters face are still frequently present in our society. What similarities do you see between contemporary society and 1979 in terms of race relations? What subtle and overt forms of racism still exist that you have seen or experienced? What has changed for the better? What has changed for the worse?

“In Plain Sight: Jeanette”

Literary Analysis
“In Plain Sight” is largely a story about haunting, not by a physical ghost, but by a sense of longing. What do the main characters of this story long for most, and where do you find specific evidence to support that? What do these characters do to fill this longing when what they desire is unable to be found?

This is also a story about community and how Water Street handles the personal crisis of a single family. In what ways does this community provide support for that family? In what ways does this community fail?

Personal Connections
Consider your own connection to a community during times of a personal crisis. How have you worked with others to support a person, or family, in need? How have others worked to support you, or your family, in your own times of need?

“An Ordinary Man: Reverend Townsend”

Literary Analysis
Reverend Townsend, in many ways, is a man who is trapped. He’s trapped by the expectations and “rules” of his community, his church, his brother, his father, and even his town’s gossip. The internal conflicts he experiences are largely caused by these trappings. Where do these conflicts present themselves in the story, and what are the specific causes of these conflicts? In what ways do similar expectations and rules serve to trap and create conflict within the character of Ariel?

Personal Connections
The communal “rules” and “social order” of Water Street greatly affect this story’s two main characters. Think deeply about the rules and social order that exist within your own community, those expectations placed upon you, or those expectations you place upon others. What are some instances where you have felt trapped by these expectations or where you might have aided in trapping others?

“Between Men: Mouse”

Literary Analysis
This story focuses closely on the life of Mouse, allowing readers to see both where he’s been and what he’s become. Arguably, the two most influential people in Mouse’s life have been his father and
mother. Closely analyze the relationships and specific interactions he has had with those characters. In what ways do those specific interactions contribute to Mouse’s present self, his lifestyle choices, and behaviors?

Personal Connections
Reflect for a moment on your own relationship with your parents or those who raised you. How have those relationships influenced who you are today? Are there specific moments or interactions you recall which feel more influential than others?

“The Evolution of Sandy Crawford: Sandy”

Literary Analysis
Using specific details found within the story’s text, compare and contrast the characters of Sandy and Jacinda. How do these similarities and differences contribute to the growth or “evolution” of Sandy’s character by the end of the story? In what ways does she change or evolve?

Personal Connections
Much of the conflict in this story revolves around a family reunion and the strain it puts upon Sandy. Are there times in your own life when planning a family event have become a source of stress or anxiety? What specific difficulties did you face in those situations and what helpful ways did you find to cope?

“The Girl of My Dreams: Kiki”

Literary Analysis
Kiki is approaching his wedding day and filled with apprehension. Reading closely, find evidence as to what’s behind this apprehension. What does he long for, fear, or regret? This story also gives readers deeper insight into his character since he first appeared in “My Girl Mona.” What things do readers learn that complicate our understanding of his character?

Personal Connections
Throughout this story, Kiki’s mind returns to various regrets from his past. These regrets of past actions ultimately lead to decisions he makes in the present. What regrets from your own past have influenced or altered decisions you’ve made in a present moment?

“The spoiled: Maxine”

Literary Analysis
“Spoiled” allows readers to witness a husband and wife as they grow apart in their marriage. Analyze this relationship more closely. How do the actions and attitude of Gene contribute Maxine’s attachment to Mouse? How do the actions and attitude of Maxine contribute to Gene’s growing detachment? What parallels or differences do you see between Gene losing Maxine’s affection and Maxine losing the affection of Mouse?
Personal Connections
Think of a relationship you once were a part of, one you found fulfilling that eventually became unfulfilling. What similarities or differences do you recognize between that relationship and the relationships of these three characters?

“The Fight: Toni and Candy”

Literary Analysis
Toni concludes this story by describing a “rubber band, stressed and pulled so tight that there is nothing left to do but snap.” Throughout the story, tension has been building between many of its characters. However, the many moments of tension in the story are also balanced by moments of tenderness. Look closely at both of these types of moments (the tense and the tender) and analyze what they reveal about these characters and their relationships.

Personal Connections
The main source of conflict in this story is a family secret that has become a major source of tension. In your own personal experience, how has the keeping of secrets created harmful tension between friends and loved ones? Has the keeping of secrets ever served a positive end?

“Sixteen Confessions of Lois Carter”

Literary Analysis
The dictionary defines a confession as, “a written or oral acknowledgment of guilt by a party accused of an offense.” Consider that definition in terms of this story. What might Lois feel guilty about that prompts her to make each of these “confessions”? In what ways do these confessions make her stronger or wear her down? What do these confessions also reveal about her larger community and the many ways race affects that community’s behaviors?

Personal Connections
What moments in these sixteen confessions feel most familiar to you? What personal experiences do you have that mirror moments within these confessions? What experiences do you have that reflect a different perspective than the one this story presents?

“Respite: Pearline”

Literary Analysis
“Respite” provides readers a detailed description of Pearline’s behavior once she has moved in with Roscoe and Lois. In analyzing her actions and dialogue, what do these reveal about her character and state in life? Also analyze Roscoe and Lois. Knowing how Pearline feels about their relationship from the previous chapter, what do their actions and words reveal about them? Through all this, Pearline undergoes a change by the story’s conclusion.
What enables her to make that change, and what does she come to realize?

**Personal Connections**
Roscoe and Lois are struggling to care for an aging family member who can no longer live by herself. What experiences do you have that involve caring for aging loved ones? Through those experiences, what have you learned about them or yourself? What are your own fears or reservations about the prospect of growing old and being unable to live alone?

"Man Crazy: Mona"

**Literary Analysis**
In this story, readers encounter Mona again, searching and longing for love. However, by her own account, she’s still left with “an emptiness.” Contrast this inner conflict and lack of fulfillment with how Mona presents herself to the world. What descriptions or actions are most revealing about how Mona feels internally?

**Personal Connections**
Though Mona frequently attracts attention to herself, she also hides much of herself from others, seemingly as a means of protection. What similar behaviors do you recognize in people you know? What similar behaviors do you recognize in yourself?

"Before I Met my Father: Angie"

**Literary Analysis**
The setting of this story exist in two competing worlds: different towns, homes, family members, and family dynamics. Compare and contrast these two worlds and analyze how they contribute to the change in Angie’s character and the choices she makes by the story’s conclusion.

**Personal Connections**
At many points in this story, Angie turns to her imagination as a source of solace and comfort. She imagines different versions of her father at different points in her life, or she imagines how happy her parents must once have been when younger. What are times in your own life when you’ve turned to imagination or made up stories to help you through a difficult time?