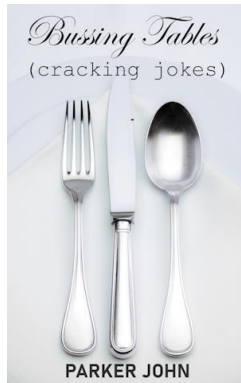


A DISCUSSION GUIDE



Jin and Ramón take turns trying to make us laugh as they bus tables on a busy Friday night. Colligan's restaurant is full of characters, including eccentric waiters, a wise bartender, a monstrous dog, and a disgusting dishwasher. And nasty customers are humored as all the busy bussers vie to win the combined ante in the toady pot.



TOPIC: SERVICE WITH A SMILE

Our busy bussers use a Toady Pot to lessen the emotional impact of the *cognitive dissonance* of service, where people are required to interact pleasantly with all customers, even though some may be dismissive or abusive.

Discuss: Name jobs where tolerating *cognitive dissonance* is often required. [waitress, receptionist, customer service rep, “crew member” in any retail store, ...] Are there any jobs for teenagers where they never have to deal with this?

TOPIC: BEING CLEVER

The noun *desert* (accent on the first syllable) means a dry, barren land. The noun *dessert* (accent on the second syllable) is a sweet course served at the end of a meal. However, the word *desert* when spelled like the former but pronounced like the latter refers to a deserved reward or punishment: He got his just deserts.

Discuss: Girly Girl, or GG, was being clever when she said, “It's just deserts. One s or two, I doubt you have a clue.” How many ways was that funny or clever? Was it too clever? Will people miss out on the multiple ways that it might be considered funny?

TOPIC: BEING SERIOUS

Four sets of codes of behavior are presented. They are serious attempts at codifying what is right and wrong when bussing tables in a restaurant.

Discuss: Does it spoil the mood in humorous storytelling to insert such things? Or might it be the opposite of *comic relief*? Does it make the storytellers more believable since they seem to be so knowledgeable about the world in which they work?

TOPIC: BEING BLUNT

Discuss: Is it appropriate to show teenagers saying blunt or crude things about adults?

TOPIC: BORROWINGS

In the Afterwords section, Ramón admits he borrowed stories from Jerome K. Jerome and suggests that Jin borrowed from Lewis Carroll. Some borrowings were short humorous bits, such as “You almost look like a man” “So do you” which is a famous retort by Edna Ferber. And the Mr. P.P. story is based on a story by Robert Benchley.

Discuss: Is it appropriate to appropriate such material and customize it for a modern story? If it were not borrowed and used now, how many people would read the original? Now that you have read the book, do you care?

TOPIC: CONTRASTS

Jin wrote and spoke like a hard-boiled detective. Her text was presented in a typewriter font. Ramón wrote and spoke in a clear and refined way; perhaps it might be called intellectual. His text was presented in normal fonts.

Discuss: Does the contrast between the characters add to the humor? How does the use of different fonts contribute to your appreciation for the story?

TOPIC: CLICHÉS ?

The wise owner. The fun bartender. The crude dishwasher. The harried waitress. The waiter who pines for a life in the movies. Kids who misbehave. Customers who seem to derive pleasure from being rude to the help.

Discuss: Are these all clichés? Are there others? Even if they are clichés, they can still be funny. Why? Might it have something to do with our appreciation for stories that are “the same but different” where we enjoy archetypes reimaged. Do you have a different explanation?

TOPIC: FUNNY NAMES

The Winterbottom family was featured in two chapters. It sounds silly, so it’s an easy bit of humor. The cooks Cameron and Dana had some fun conjuring their own silly names.

Discuss: Come up with a few just-as-silly surnames. [Clutterbuck, Dangerfield, Grossweiner, Wigglesworth, ... (Have fun, but don’t be gross.)]

TOPIC: FUNNY ACTIONS

A little boy wipes some booger snot on a window. (Okay, that’s gross.) It’s a cheap joke, but it’s funny in part because it was a surprise.

Discuss: What other surprising or funny actions can you identify in the story?