

LIBERATION DAY

GEORGE SAUNDERS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as the overarching themes of this collection? How do you think the stories connect?
2. Discuss Saunders's distinctive use of style, tone, and dialogue—and how they draw the reader into the characters and into the narrative.
3. In the first story, “Liberation Day,” George Saunders brings us to another world, like ours but different. How does his use of language—unPinioned, the Speaking Wall, the Listening Room, a Knowledge Mod—deepen the story? What do you think the adult son Mike represents? What is Saunders saying about class, and about history and how it is remembered?
4. How is the concept of justice complicated in “The Mom of Bold Action”?
5. “History, when it arrives, may not look as you expect, based on the reading of history books. Things in there are always so clear. One knows exactly what one would have done,” writes a grandfather to his grandson in “Love Letter.” What makes this story so powerful? Which parts were the most chilling?
6. In “A Thing at Work,” we witness the characters’ inner thought spirals, second guessing themselves after exchanges. What were you thinking as you paddled up Brenda’s stream of consciousness? What’s your stance on pilfering office supplies? Ha! Did she deserve what she got in the end? How did the fact they worked as subcontractors for Kodak color the story? Where do you think these characters—Gen, Tim, Brenda, Ed—will be in their lives five years after the story ended?

7. Describe the story “Sparrow” in three words. What does this story say about the mysteries of relationships? Did you have any preconceived notions about Gloria and Randy, expecting a different outcome for them? If so, what? How did you feel about the book’s narrator?
8. How did you picture “the vast, underground space” approximately located beneath the city of Pueblo, Colorado in “Ghoul,” and what in particular made it hellish to you? If you were forced to work in one of its areas, which one would it be: WILD DAY OUT WEST, CHICAGO HIDEOUT, DISCO LOVE NEST, VICTORIAN WEEKEND, NOW WE JOUST, or another? Please explain.
9. Strict rules, sudden violence, mob mentality, a promise that never comes. At the end of “Ghoul,” Brian asks, “Is this world we have made a world in which lovers may thrive?” Expand that thought and apply it to the world we’re living in now. Are we complicit in “this world we have made”? Why or why not?
10. Did your views of Alma and Debi change over the course of “Mother’s Day”? And if so, why?
11. George Saunders plays with syntax in “Elliott Spencer.” How did that style serve the story?
Why do *oppressors* wish to poke *weak*? I say.
They’re bad, says Jer. Have to be stopped.
What does “Elliott Spencer” say about power and the right to protest?
12. In “My House,” why do you think Mel Hays decided not to sell his house? Was it really what the narrator thought or something deeper?
13. In thinking of a letter that is never written or sent, the narrator posits: “I hope you live forever, and if the place falls down around you, as it seems to be doing, I hope even that brings you joy. It was always falling down around you, everything has always been falling down around us. Only we were too alive to notice.” What does this sentiment mean to you? In particular the “too alive to notice” part.
14. How did you feel at the end of *Liberation Day*? What range of emotions did George Saunders elicit in you? If you were to recommend one story to a dear friend, which one