

Discussion Guide for *A Work of Art* by Melody Maysonet

1. In the book's opening paragraph, Tera says that painting her dad is "*all about mood.*" What mood does the author create in describing this painting? After reading this paragraph, how do you think Tera sees her father?
2. In chapter three, Tera's dad is teaching five-year-old Tera to draw a self-portrait. In what ways does this chapter foreshadow their relationship?
3. Tera spends the first third of the book trying to protect her dad from the allegations against him, even using her money for art school to hire an expensive lawyer. Do you think she has blinded herself to her father's misdeeds? If so, why do you think that is?
4. How has Tera's dad manipulated Tera's relationship with her mother?
5. Why do you think Tera's mom doesn't do a better job of protecting Tera? Do you think her mother redeems herself at the end?
6. Do you think Haley was a bad friend to Tera? Why or why not?
7. Most of the book is told in first person, but the flashback chapters are told in third person. Why do you think the author chose to put Tera's memories in third person? Similarly, why do you think the flashback chapters have titles, whereas the other chapters do not?
8. Tera references several famous paintings in the book, including Salvador Dali's *Persistence of Memory* (more commonly known as "Melting Clocks") and Picasso's *Guernica*. Why do you think Tera is drawn to these paintings?
9. In the flashback chapter titled "Tin Man," a young Tera compares herself to several *Wizard of Oz* characters, including the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. What similarities does Tera have to these characters? What differences?
10. How would you describe Joey? Why is Tera drawn to him?
11. What are some of the parallels between Tera's relationship with her father and Tera's relationship with Joey?
12. Dogs crop up again and again in *A Work of Art*. As a child, Tera had a dog that ran away. Joey's uncle has a dog named Po'Boy. Tera's father tells her to imagine she's a dog when he's trying to get her to pose for a photo. Tera's mom tells her she follows her dad around like a dog. Tera tries—and fails—to sculpt a dog from clay. Discuss the symbolism of dogs in the book.

13. At the beginning of the book, Tera describes her art teacher Mr. Stewart as her mentor, but she's angry with him for much of the book. Do you think he proves to be a good mentor to Tera? Why or why not?

14. Mr. Stewart tries to get Tera to improve her art by digging deeper into her emotions. Why does Tera resist his advice?

15. As an artist, Tera's world is very visual—yet the author never describes her physical appearance. Why do you think that is?

16. Why do you think the author chose "A Work of Art" as the book's title? Do you think it's a fitting title? Why or why not?

17. What do you think is the overall message, or theme, of *A Work of Art*?