

## ***GRANDMOTHER'S STORY – DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

by Sue O'Halloran

### **Discussion Questions**

Have you ever interviewed a family member to collect family stories? Is there someone in your family you wish you had talked to more who is no longer with us?

How would you feel if you had to support a family who lived somewhere else?

Why did the British hate the Irish? How do groups who are Insiders justify their exclusion of the Outsider?

Why didn't Susan grow up hearing traditional Irish music? Do you think it's a positive or negative thing that so many groups lost their culture in becoming American?

### **Research Areas:**

Research British colonialism. How did England and other imperialist countries justify their exploitation?

Look into the Nativists' treatment of the Irish in the early 1800s. Find cartoons and articles describing the Irish as subhuman.

Read about how the Irish and other European groups who were once considered of a different race than Anglo-Americans became "white." How did people such as the Irish who were Outsiders at one time in this country become Insiders? Why weren't some people able to make the same journey?

Review the Supreme Court's decisions about who was "white" in America. Why did the Court's decisions change so often?

## Resources:

### Books:

*Out of Ireland: The Story of Irish Emigration to America* by Kerby Miller and Paul Wagner  
Elliot & Clark Publishing

*How the Irish Became White* by Noel Ignatiev (*Looks at Irish and African-American relations and how the Irish were assimilated into being "white"*) Routledge Publishing

*The Invention of the White Race* by Theodore W. Allen Verso Press (The relativity of race from 1600s-1800s)

*White By Law* by Ian F. Haney Lopez New York University Press (History of the Supreme Court decisions on who is white)

### Video:

PBS three-part series on recent DNA research and Supreme Court decisions around who was white. Based on the book *White By Law*.

## ***CITY GIRLS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

*By Sue O'Halloran*

1. Were you aware of how segregated the city of Chicago was during the 1950s and 60s? How segregated is it today? What do you think is better or worse about race relations today?
2. Have you ever heard stereotypes about other schools or other parts of the city? Are you aware of stereotypes about different religious or income groups? Where do these stereotypes come from? What can you do to “manage” or break up these stereotypes?
3. Why was Sue nervous to appear prejudiced? Does everyone have prejudices? How do *you* act when you’re self-conscious around someone who is different from you? What other ways could you behave? What does it mean to be “real”?
4. What was the difference between how Patty or Susan or Joy acted and how they really felt inside?
5. Why were the girls nervous to talk about race? Does it make you uncomfortable? What are the topics/stories/events that are not talked about or bring discomfort in your family or school? How can you create a space to talk about difficult issues and ask these questions?
6. What is the difference between sharing yourself with others in a meaningful way and talking about your personal life in the dramatic way some people do today on talk shows?
7. Why was Susan’s stomach “upset all the time”? How do our physical bodies act out the things we suppress? How does our national body (our country) act out the pain we suppress?
8. What is the link between the personal suppression of pain and political suppression? Why did the nun say that the way we avoid who we are as people is very similar to how we avoid who we are as a nation? What did Susan mean that “we were more covered up than the nuns?” and “We had the habit of not talking in our families and the habit of not talking in our country”?
9. What judgment did Susan make about Patty? What did she discover was the real reason for Patty bringing several suitcases to the retreat?
10. What’s the difference between feeling guilty about something and taking responsibility? What did Susan mean when she said guilt had frozen her brain? What new thought did Joy and Patty give her about her mother’s alcoholism and death? What new thoughts would we have to have in order to stop feeling guilty about race and to start taking responsibility?
11. Why did Joy feel she had to become what her parents wanted her to become?
12. Susan asked, “How were we supposed to get help for our problems if none of us would admit they were there?” Who could Joy, Patty and Susan have gone to for help? What individuals or



# Susan D'Hafforan

organizations would have been supportive to them? Who do you trust? Where can you go to get trustworthy and/or professional help when you have a problem?

13. Why did Susan start to take the risk to talk about race with Joy and Patty? What gave her the courage or changed her mind?

14. What was Joy's answer to Susan's question, "Was it prejudiced to notice color?" and "When is it rude to ask questions?" What's the distinction between talking respectfully about race and other differences and speaking inappropriately such as asking others to "educate" us?

15. Do you think telling the truth would make a difference in this country and in our personal lives? What kind of difference?

16. Do you have somewhere where you feel listened to and can say what you are truly feeling inside? Do you have it here? What can you do to make this group even safer?

17. What are the barriers to valuing people who are different from you?

18. What are the benefits to individuals, the school and the society if we valued and appreciated even more?

19. What would Walter Payton look like if students felt like they belonged? What would you *hear* in the halls and classrooms? What kinds of behaviors would you *see*?

20. Do you believe we can build a more wonderful world? What part would you play in that? What can you do in the next months to make Walter Payton be a school where everyone feels appreciated and has a sense of belonging?