

Discussion & Reflection Questions for *Miss Bertie Explains the Beginning of the World* by Minnie Lamberth

Prologue – The Revelation Awaits

- Have you ever wanted to make a good first impression, but it didn't go as well as you would have liked? How did you deal with that situation?
- Have you ever felt a uncertain calling toward a creative project? You knew you wanted to do something but weren't sure what that would be?

Chapter One – The Word Goes Fourth

- Did you go to Sunday School as a child? If so, who is the first teacher you can remember? What was she/he like?
- Do you remember hearing the creation story from Genesis in the Bible when you were a child? How did you feel about this story?
- What are the characteristics of a good storyteller?
- Have you ever been a children's Sunday school teacher? If so, what was that experience like for you?

Chapter Two – Calling the Committee to Order

- Have you ever served on a church committee? What was that experience like for you?
- Do you feel more comfortable in a more traditional church or more "modern" church? Why?

Chapter Three – Animals Get their Names

- How did you get your name? Who named you? How was your name chosen?
- Miss Bertie says, "...God gave people the ability to give names to things. And we should use this ability with great care so that we won't hurt each other." How do we have the power to bless or to curse people with the names we call them?

- In the telling of the story of Adam and Eve, how does Miss Bertie portray God? Vengeful or merciful? How was God presented to you as a child? How has your perception of God's nature changed as you have matured?

Chapter Four – Name Check in the Cereal Aisle

- Carmen talks about how Miss Bertie said we should be careful about the names we give ourselves. What lesson could you draw from this idea of paying attention to what we call ourselves?

Chapter Five – There's No Place Like Home

- Due to changing family circumstances, Hannah moves back home as an adult. Have you ever returned to a former environment and had to readjust to a new role?

Chapter Six – The First Family Feud

- Miss Bertie tells the children in her Sunday School class, "God asks the question we all need to ask ourselves sometimes, 'Why are you angry?' ... God asks Cain this question in the Bible and its an important one that we need to keep with us. Because if we don't know the answer, we might make a huge mistake." Do you find this to be true? How could unrecognized anger cause us to make mistakes?

Chapter Seven – The Panhandler from the Panhandle

- Miss Bertie advises her former student, Eric, to return home by saying two words at a time: "I'm sorry" and "Forgive me." How have you found these words to be powerful in your own life?

Chapter Eight – The Secret's in the Source

- When Hannah makes a stop at the Piggly Wiggly, she learns that both the grocery bagger and the lady in the bakery have been blessed by Miss Bertie's encouraging words. How can you use your words to encourage those who serve you?

Chapter Nine – Getting to the Heart of the Matter

- Hannah is curious to hear Miss Bertie's opinion on a new development in the community. Who is someone whose perspective you value?

Chapter Ten – Miss Bertie Dusts Off an Old Story

- Miss Bertie mentions the contents of her home and wonders if others would know which items are the ones she treasured. What are the “treasures” in your home?

Chapter Eleven – A Homesick Soldier’s Letter Home

- Have there been experiences in your life when you felt homesick? What helped you get through that time?

Chapter Twelve – The Germ of an Idea

- Myra says to Hannah, “I just get the sense that some people think Miss Bertie is too old to teach children about God.” What does an older person have to offer that a younger person might not?

Chapter Thirteen – The Son Rises at Dawn

- Mitchell is the school janitor before Miss Bertie encouraged him to go to community college and get a degree. Who encouraged you to think bigger? Who could you encourage to think beyond where they are now?

Chapter Fourteen – The Electrician Makes a Connection

- Hannah is sent by her boss to take photographs of the scene of a car accident, and she is surprised by the grief that wells up within her as she is reminded of her own loss. Can you relate to unexpected reminders of grief?

Chapter Fifteen – A Time of Terrible Days

- Miss Bertie tells Hannah that her grandfather was saved by an “enemy” Yankee when he was at a POW camp in Illinois. When has an “enemy” surprised you?

Chapter Sixteen – Trouble That Doesn’t End

- Miss Bertie tell Hannah, “...over time I ventured into my own battlefields, through by my social training, I spoke of my experiences as if I were walking through a garden on a sunny afternoon and all was well.” What sorts of difficult experiences is it “taboo” to talk about in our culture?

Chapter Seventeen – The Talk Around Town

- Hannah’s mother says she doesn’t plan to listen to a call-in radio show because the host comes across to her as “a little bit self-important.” Even so, Hannah’s mother

makes allowances for him because of his difficult childhood. How can we remember to avoid judging people without first considering their experiences? How can we guard against our own tendencies to present ourselves as “self-important?”

Chapter Eighteen – Life After Loss

- Miss Bertie says to Hannah, “Does the body itself, the spirit of man, have an inborn need to keep going? That’s what I’ve felt.” Do you agree?
- Miss Bertie tells Hannah that when she was a public-school teacher, she knew that the “unseen” in her students’ lives influenced what was going on in her classroom. How does a child’s home and family environment influence their experience in school?

Chapter Nineteen – Seeing Life through a Cloud

- Hannah asks Miss Bertie, “What are the unseen things that have influenced your life?” How would you answer that question.

Chapter Twenty – Checking the Weather

- Katie (the nurse) tells Hannah she believes there’s a reason she wanted to pursue her career and not just because it’s a good job but because she is helping people. Have you felt a call to use your training to help people either in a career or volunteer role?

Chapter Twenty-One – Waiting Out the Storm

- Hurricane season in the South has brought lots of memorable and at times difficult storm experiences. Do you recall times you have had to stay indoors while waiting out a difficult storm outside?

Chapter Twenty-Two – The Spark that Lights a Fire

- Miss Bertie talks about how the ability to be grateful in the midst of a difficult experience is a miracle in itself. How can we cultivate gratitude, even in the midst of grief and loss?

Chapter Twenty-Three – In the Aisles of the Mission Field

- Miss Bertie tells Hannah, “Distracted by purposeful work, I slowly became different inside, and everything on the outside got better too.” What work do you find

meaningful? How have you found meaningful work to be helpful in coping with loss, pain, or disappointment?

Chapter Twenty-Four – The Committee Reconvenes

- The leaders of the Wellton Baptist Church are concerned that the new church will pose a threat to their attendance numbers. Why do people tend to be threatened by change?

Chapter Twenty-Five – The Thaw in the Refrigerator Section

- Miss Bertie chats with Mark in the Piggly Wiggly and tells him how much she enjoys having Emily (his daughter) in her Sunday School class. She says that Emily is curious. What parent doesn't like to her their child complemented? How does this seem to shift Mark's relationship with Miss Bertie?

Chapter Twenty-Six – Hannah Seeks Clarification

- In Hannah's conversation with Miss Bertie, she talks about a dream she has that seems too far away. However, Miss Bertie reminds her that she can start doing what she is called to do wherever she is. Is there something you can begin doing today?

Chapter Twenty-Seven – A Committee Decision Gets Appealed

- Miss Bertie says to Hannah, "We all have to do this, you know. See the good and the bad and decide what part will have the greater influence." Have you seen the good and bad in a relationship or an organization and decided which part matters most?

Chapter Twenty-Eight – Moved to the Head of the Class

- Have you had an experience where you were frustrated about a need for change, and then you ended up being the answer to that change? Or is there a current situation where you could be the answer to the problem you see?