

Reader's Guide & Starting Points For Discussion of *The War of the Rosens*

1. The initial scenes in **The War of the Rosens** introduce us to Leo Rosen and his young daughter, Emma. As a young man, Leo had wanted to be a writer; instead, he has become the owner of a struggling candy store in the Bronx. How do his feelings about not having become a writer influence the way he's raising Emma? Which of Emma's desires and needs are heavily influenced and shaped by Leo's desires and needs?
2. What do Leo and Annette teach their daughters about religion? Why do Emma and May struggle so hard to understand their relationship to Judaism? Why do they choose such different paths to explore their Jewish identities?
3. On pages 11-14, we're introduced to Hannah Zelig, whose very existence seems to anger Leo. Is Leo really angry at her, or is there something within himself that prompts this anger?
4. How does the novel's setting, in a Bronx housing project in 1965, affect the storyline? What is distinctive about this locale?
5. How do war and politics help to shape the Rosen family?
6. What enables Emma to forge an identity so different from her mother's? In what ways is she very different from Annette? Are there any ways in which she is like Annette?

7. Why does Emma seek out the statue of the Virgin Mary? What does she hope to learn from the statue? What does the statue symbolize to her?
8. Why does May switch best friends so often? What about May's character makes her feel that she needs to do this?
9. Are the interactions between May and Emma typical of sibling relations? If so, why? If not, why not?
10. Why is Leo so drawn to Cookie Coke? Is Cookie a sympathetic character? If so, why? If not, why not?
11. Why is May so drawn to Marvin Ludwig? Is Marvin equally drawn to May?
12. *The War of the Rosens* is told from the viewpoints of all the family members. How does this technique add to our understanding of each character? How does this technique propel the book forward and add to its narrative drive? How does the author establish a distinctive voice for each character?