

Leaving Home

by David French

As we are told at the beginning of the play, Leaving Home “is set in Toronto on an early November day in the late fifties” (4). The play deals with the relationships among the Mercer family. In particular, it deals with the relationship between Ben, the oldest son, and Jacob, the father. Here is some background information before we begin reading:

- Jacob and Mary Mercer are originally from Newfoundland.
Newfoundland became a province of Canada in 1949. It was the last province to join Confederation. At the time of the play (“late fifties”), many Newfoundlanders still thought of themselves as being Newfoundlanders, not Canadians.
- Early in Canadian history, religious differences were often a source of conflict between people. The major religious groups in Canada were Roman Catholics and Protestants. Both groups are Christian religions that believe in the Bible, but the Catholics follow the leadership of the Pope in Rome. Protestants are any Christian group that is not Catholic—Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, Lutherans, etc. Often towns were divided into Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods, and if someone was caught in the wrong neighbourhood, he might suffer terrible consequences. In this play, we see some of that religious conflict occurring with Jacob Mercer.
- Families are often filled with conflict, especially between children and parents.



Before reading the play...

1. Have you ever had conflict with your parents? On a separate piece of paper, create a list of reasons for conflict that could occur between parents and children.
2. Once you made the list, imagine yourself in the role of a parent and try to think of the conflict from a father's or mother's position. What are some of the reasons for the conflict from the parents' perspective?
3. Does religion cause conflict in society today? What are some of the conflicts?

Questions for pages 4-30

1. Look at how the playwright French has written Mary and Jacob's lines.
 - a. What is unusual about the words?
 - b. Why would French write their lines this way?
 - c. How are their lines written differently from Billy's and Ben's?
 - d. What does this difference suggest about their characters?
2. What important event is happening for Billy?

3. Explain why Ben did not invite Jacob to his graduation.
 - a. What do you think of Ben's reason? Was it a good reason?
 - b. What other reasons would Ben have?
4. On page 19, Jacob talks about his Uncle Isaac. How does this incident in the past affect his opinion of Catholics today?
5. Besides being a mother, what is Mary's role between her sons and her husband in the household?
6. Why does Jacob taunt Ben into drinking screech?
7. Ben claims that Jacob feels threatened by him. Do you think that this is true? Explain your reasoning in a paragraph.



Questions for pages 31-74 (end of Act One)

Tribulation (72): an annoying, frustrating, or catastrophic event

1. What has happened to Kathy? How does this incident change things between Kathy and Bill?
2. Is Bill's "So?" in response to Kathy's question reasonable? Explain why and why not.
3. On page 39 Mary's old boyfriend Jerome McKenzie is mentioned.
 - a. Who is Jerome McKenzie?
 - b. Why does Mary continue to mention him?
 - c. What does "Q.C." mean?
4. We get more insight into Jacob's problems with his son Ben. On pages 42 and 43, Jacob tells us why he pushes Ben.
 - a. What are his reasons?
 - b. What does Mary think his reasons are?
5. We finally meet Kathy's mother, Minnie. Describe Minnie in your own words (use school appropriate language).
6. Who is Harold? Why is Minnie going out with him?
7. Why is Kathy so eager to marry Bill?

8. How do you know that in spite of it all, Jacob is extremely proud of Ben (find a quotation to support your opinion)?
9. Why didn't Jacob and Minnie get married? How has Minnie got her revenge on Jacob and his father?
10. What is the irony of Jacob's comment on the top of 71?
11. Minnie says, "See, Jacob? See what I'm up against? No shame!" (72). What is the irony of Minnie's comment?
12. What is Minnie's reaction to Kathy's news about losing the baby?
13. How does Mary react to Kathy and to her news?
14. What does Mary's reaction tell the audience about her?

Questions for pages 75-89

1. What reasons does Minnie have for going through with the wedding? List them.
2. Knowing what we know about Minnie, is money a priority with her? Explain.
3. "Why can't they get married and Billy still go to school?" (77). Why would Ben say this?
4. Why does Jacob still want Billy and Kathy to get married?
5. Why does Billy not speak up when everyone else makes decisions about whether or not the wedding should take place?
6. Why might Mary be urging such caution about these two young people marrying?
7. Jacob quotes this Biblical verse on page 80: "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Thy two breasts are like two young roes [deer] that are twins" (Song of Solomon 7:1-3). Why would he remember this particular verse?
8. Jacob is a man filled with contradictions. One minute he wants Billy to get married, and the next he is telling him not to. What are his reasons for Billy not to get married?
9. When Billy looks to his brother for help, Ben offers him none.
 - a. How does that make you feel towards Ben?
 - b. Why doesn't Ben offer help to Billy?



Questions for pages 90-105

1. List the tactics that Jacob uses to convince Ben not to leave.
2. When Ben stays firm about his decision to leave, Jacob begins to "help" him pack.
 - a. What is funny about Jacob's actions to Ben's leaving?
 - b. What advice would you give Jacob?
3. Ben tries to explain why his father's temper is partly to blame on himself, his mother, and his brother. What is the reason that he gives?
4. What act does Jacob commit that goes "too far"? Later, Jacob again goes too far with his behaviour towards Ben. What does he finally do to his son?
5. Jacob tells Mary that Ben has always hated him. What information does Mary reveal to her husband that proves he loves his father?
6. Mary tells the story about the little girl at the end of the play. Explain why Jacob's reaction to the story made Mary marry him. Does this final story change your feelings for Jacob?
7. There are no heroes in this play. Using examples either agree or disagree with this statement.

