



Alzheimer's Graphic Medicine Discussion Guide:

Tangles: A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother, and Me by Sarah Leavitt

From the publisher... “Sarah Leavitt reveals how Alzheimer’s disease transformed her mother, Midge, and her family forever. In spare black-and-white drawings and clear, candid prose, Sarah shares her family’s journey through a harrowing range of emotions—shock, denial, hope, anger, frustration—all the while learning to cope, and managing to find moments of happiness.”

Why a Graphic Novel?

- Research suggests that we are better at understanding and absorbing information presented in visual forms, such as comics.
- Stories are more engaging than factual information alone. How much easier is it to remember and empathize with something a friend experienced versus hard statistics alone?
- Coined by Ian Williams, a physician in the UK, Graphic Medicine “is the intersection of the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare.”
 - Graphic medicine, then, combines visual storytelling and medicine, creating a unique opportunity for readers to experience and learn about healthcare experiences through comics.

To Learn More...

- www.graphicmedicine.org – The home base for all things graphic medicine.
- *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto* by MK Czerwiec et al. Available from Penn State University Press.



Created by Raeshelle Cooke as part of the NNLM Region 7 Graphic Medicine Initiative.

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Questions for Discussion

1. Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles: A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me* emerged out of Leavitt's experience caring for her mother who suffered from Alzheimer's. Did Leavitt succeed in showing her and her family's grief and struggle with the disease?
2. Did you like the visual aspects of this book? Do you think the format of a graphic novel is effective for a memoir like fictional accounts? Does the graphic novel element lessen or strengthen the seriousness of the topic for you?
3. Do the characters or the events that take place in the book remind you of anyone you know, or instances that have taken place in your life?
4. Did *Tangles* change your perception of people who suffer from Alzheimer's? Did it change your perception of people who have to live with or care for people with Alzheimer's?
5. *Tangles* is ultimately a story about family and the importance of relationships during the hardest of times. Do you think Leavitt's illustrations captured that strong family foundation?
6. *Tangles* shows that people notice changes in their loved ones even before an Alzheimer's diagnosis. How did the family approach the topic with Leavitt's mother? How did she respond? Could they have handled it better?
7. *Tangles* also provides a look into the back-and-forth struggle with religious faith. What were you able to take away from this story about the struggle with having faith, or having it to get through hard times? Was it anything you ever experienced?
8. Leavitt and her family weren't always patient with her mother or didn't always handle the situation well. What were examples of them handling a difficult situation poorly? What could they have done differently? How can we ensure a person with Alzheimer's receives the care they need without damaging our own mental health in the process?
9. Being a caregiver can be stressful. What were some examples of caregiver stress in *Tangles*? What were examples of coping mechanisms (positive and negative) that Leavitt showed?
10. Leavitt and her family's lives changed a lot to accommodate her mom's Alzheimer's. In what ways did their lives change? Were there things they could have done before or early on to ease the transition?
11. Would you share this book with people in your life? Why or why not?

Remember: These are just suggested questions and there could be many, many more. Don't feel tethered to these – let the conversation flow naturally and use these questions as starting points when conversation stalls.



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