

# STUDY GUIDE

**STUDY GUIDE**  
***TRAVELING LEFT OF CENTER AND OTHER STORIES***  
**BY NANCY CHRISTIE**

This study guide is provided free of charge to book clubs, teachers and others wishing to conduct group discussions about *Traveling Left of Center and Other Stories* by Nancy Christie.

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

The following are the author's suggested questions to consider.

➤ **General questions**

- The stories in this book are all about people who can not or will not keep their lives on track. Do you think a person can be so influenced by the past that he or she is unable to make wise choices in the present?
- In some of these stories, the characters are searching for something or someone — security, safety, love. In others, they are searching for escape. Choose one of the stories and identify the motivation that drives the character. What other choices might he or she have made?

➤ ***Traveling Left of Center***

- Why do you think the character continues to get pregnant? Is it just carelessness?
- Does she truly believe that each relationship will end “happily ever after”?

➤ ***Alice in Wonderland***

- Who do you think is responsible for Alice's living condition: her mother or herself? Has she chosen to stay or does she have no other choice?
- How much does an adult child owe to a parent? Are there situations where an adult child has the right to choose his or her life over the needs of a parent?

➤ ***The Sugar Bowl***

- Chloe is presented as someone who controls the outcome of each encounter, through careful planning and creative embellishment of her life history. But is she really in control or a victim of her need to create an alternate reality that is far from the truth?
- In what ways were the men in the story her victims?

➤ ***The Shop on the Square***

- Do you think the young man was aware of his own prejudice and condescending attitude toward the shopkeeper? What role do you think that played in her decision at the end of the story?
- Do you think it's possible for two people from such different cultures to ever truly understand each other?

➤ ***Watching for Billy***

- Agnes opens her door, and her heart, to young Billy, putting herself at risk. What do you think motivated her decision?
- What do you think is the reason for Agnes' passivity and lack of action: fear of possible retaliation or fear that Billy might leave her?

➤ ***The Healer***

- Cassie questioned whether her birth was the cause of her mother's death or, in a strange way, the act that finally freed her mother from the pain of her gift. Which scenario do you think is more likely — that the act of childbirth killed her mother or freed her?
- Did Cassie have a right to refuse to use her gift to benefit another?

➤ ***The Clock***

- Margaret is presented as a nagging, unpleasant wife who verbally abuses her husband, while he appears to be the victim. What role has he played in their marital dynamics?
- Was his choice of action at the end of the story out of character?

➤ ***Anything Can Happen***

- Is it possible that trying too hard to prevent unfortunate or tragic events can actually have the opposite effect?
- Can the fear of a certain outcome cause that outcome?

➤ ***Out of Sight, Out of Mind***

- Do you think the character in the story understands the difference between right and wrong?
- What makes his personal set of principles and rules 'wrong'?

➤ ***Misconnections***

- What does Anna want — and why do you think she hasn't found it?
- What do you think Anna will do — stay married, or pursue a different path?

➤ ***Skating on Thin Ice***

- How is the story's title a metaphor for Sarah's life?
- Is she the helpless victim of others' decisions? What do you think will cause Sarah to take charge of her own life?

➤ ***Still Life***

- The story opens with the character imagining her ideal life. When does engaging in such detailed imaginings tend to be beneficial or harmful?
- From how it should be to how it is — how would you characterize the character's attitude: realistic or defeatist?

➤ ***The Storyteller***

- It's clear that the children benefit from Connie's storytelling. But what benefit does Connie derive from these encounters?
- What do you think Connie will do now that she can no longer tell her children, or herself, these stories?

➤ ***Exit Row***

- It's clear that the husband has been unhappy in his marriage from the beginning. Why has he chosen to stay?
- Is he the victim in this marriage or does he bear some responsibility for the situation in which he lives?

➤ ***Waiting for Sarah***

- Guilt and grief are the two emotions that permeate this story, told from the mother's perspective. If the daughter were telling the story, what emotions do you think would predominate?
- If you could talk with the mother, what advice would you give her for dealing with this situation?

➤ ***Beautiful Dreamer***

- Before the phone calls began, Eleanor was withdrawn and isolated. But once she believed that someone wanted her and thought her beautiful, her attitude changed. How do you think her life might have changed if she had been more open to people all along?
- What do you think Eleanor will do when her lover fails to make contact?

➤ ***The Kindness of Strangers***

- Do you think that sometimes it is easier to ask for or accept kindness or assistance from strangers than from family members? Why or why not?
- What do you think motivates Kate to continue to visit Mona despite the hostility directed at her — love or guilt?

➤ ***Annabelle***

- Throughout the story, Annabelle does her best to hide from the truth surrounding her mother's death. What is she afraid of facing?
- In your opinion, was Annabelle's choice at the end an act of self-destruction or an irresistible desire to return to the safety of her childhood?

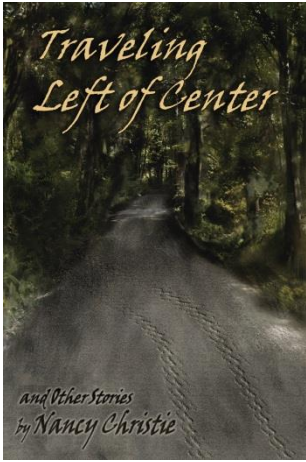
If your group develops other questions that prove to lead to energized, interesting discussions, please share them with us, and we may add them to future iterations of this study guide.

## CONNECTING WITH THE AUTHOR

Nancy Christie is available to chat with book clubs, classes and other discussion groups about *Traveling Left of Center and Other Stories*. Pixel Hall Press can help your group (minimum of 8 people) arrange for a phone, Skype or Google Hangout conference call with her. Depending on her schedule, a personal appearance may be possible. Contact [Info@PixelHallPress.com](mailto:Info@PixelHallPress.com).

**Book club leaders, please note:** Discounts are available for volume purchases of Pixel Hall Press books, either directly from Pixel Hall Press, or through Ingram Book Distributors.

## ABOUT *TRAVELING LEFT OF CENTER AND OTHER STORIES*



“Girl,” my mama had said to me the minute she entered my hospital room, “on the highway of life, you’re always traveling left of center.”

What happens when people face life situations for which they are emotionally or mentally unprepared? They may choose to allow fate to dictate the path they take — a decision that can lead to disastrous results.

The characters in *Traveling Left of Center and Other Stories* are unable or unwilling to seize control over their lives, relying instead on coping methods that range from the passive (*The Healer*) and the aggressive (*The Clock*) to the humorous (*Traveling Left of Center*) and hopeful (*Skating on Thin Ice*). But the outcomes may not be what they anticipated or desired. Will they have time to correct their course or will they crash?

## ABOUT NANCY CHRISTIE

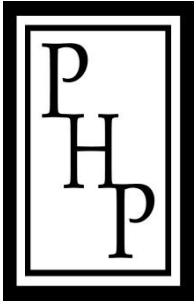
Nancy Christie is a full-time professional writer whose passion is fiction. As she explains, “I have been making up stories since I was a child, engaging in ‘what if’ and ‘let’s pretend’ activities that took me far beyond my northeastern Ohio home. And I’m still doing it — only for a much larger audience!” (Please see the [One on One Interview](#) with Nancy for more insights about how and why she writes fiction.)

In addition to her two PHP Shorts e-books, [Annabelle](#) and [Alice in Wonderland](#), her short stories can be found in literary publications such as *Full of Crow*, *Fiction365*, *Red Fez*, *Wanderings*, *The Chaffin Journal* and *Xtreme*. Nancy is currently working on several other book projects, including a novel and a book for writers. She is founder of [Celebrate Short Fiction](#) Day, which Pixel Hall Press fully [supports](#).



A member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors, Nancy teaches workshops at writing conferences and schools across the country and hosts the monthly Monday Night Writers group in Canfield, Ohio. Visit her website at [www.NancyChristie.com](http://www.NancyChristie.com) or connect with her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or at her writing blogs: [Finding Fran](#), [The Writer’s Place](#) and [One on One](#).

## ABOUT PIXEL HALL PRESS



Pixel Hall Press ([www.PixelHallPress.com](http://www.PixelHallPress.com)) is a relatively new, old-fashioned small publishing house whose focus is on discovering literary gems and great stories that might otherwise be overlooked. Our mission is to publish books that energize the imagination and intrigue the mind, and to be a conduit between readers and provocative, stimulating, talented authors.

In this era of digital technology, Wall Street involvement and merger mania, many mainstream publishers seem to have lost sight of core principles and the purpose of publishing. At the other end of the spectrum is the veritable avalanche of self-published books that are notoriously uneven in quality. Small boutique imprints like Pixel Hall Press are reclaiming the heart and soul of publishing by reviving the idea that a publisher's *raison d'être* is finding and nurturing great writers, and to provide readers with beautiful, meaningful, truly enjoyable books.