

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
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PRESENTS

WORDS ^{on} PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

The Quality of Life

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JANE ANDERSON
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Both couples in *The Quality of Life* are dealing with terrible personal loss. How are their means of coping similar and how are they different?
2. What is each character's perception of death, dying, and suffering? How does this understanding dictate his/her actions in the play?
3. How does the physical setting of a burn site contribute to the play's discussions about life and loss? What do the burn site's adornments tell you about Jeannette and Neil?
4. Most of the action in *The Quality of Life* takes place during one afternoon between two couples who have been out of contact for many years. How do the events of this afternoon change each character individually? How do they alter each marriage?
5. How do the events of this play affect your own thinking about end-of-life choices? Do you think Neil's decision to end his life early is noble or cowardly? How do you feel about Jeannette's initial plan to die with her husband and her final decision to keep going?
6. Consider how the characters' religious beliefs differ. How do the events of this play challenge their personal belief systems?
7. Have you ever experienced a wildfire? If so, how does that incident affect how you respond to the play? What else are you bringing into your interpretation of this play?
8. Jeannette and Neil comment on the "silliness" of what they chose to take as they fled the fire: "a pen and a pair of glasses." What do these objects say about each of their owners? Do the circumstances of these characters make you reexamine the value you place on your own belongings? In a moment of emergency, what would you take?
9. Initially, Bill and Dinah are presented as "salt-of-the-earth" Midwesterners, whereas Jeannette and Neil come across as free-spirited Californians. How does the action of the play challenge these stereotypes?
10. What does Bill mean when he refers to Jeannette and Neil as a "cult of two"? How does Jeannette and Bill's relationship differ from Dinah and Bill's?