

Reading Guide

Drinking Coffee Elsewhere by ZZ Packer

Read for the pleasure and excitement of the stories and the reading experience. Since you'll have many opportunities to talk to others at SJSU about the book, as you read, you may want to jot down some notes about characters, events and passages that are interesting to you, as well as your thoughts about the stories. Bring your notes to the discussion group you attend. If you have questions, visit the website (www.sjsu.edu/reading/) or send an email to sjsureads@sjsu.edu.

Brief Overview to the 8 Stories

Brownies – Interactions of Brownie Girl Scouts of different ethnicities and life experiences during a camping trip.

Every Tongue Shall Confess – Story of Clareese, a nurse and devoted church member, and a patient she tries to save.

Our Lady of Peace – Experiences Lynnea has in becoming a high school teacher in Baltimore.

The Ant of the Self – Spurgeon and his father, Ray Bivens Jr., journey to the Million Man March.

Drinking Coffee Elsewhere – Coming-of-age story of Dina, a young woman starting at Yale, and her struggles to fit in and learn about herself.

Speaking in Tongues – Tia's adventures as a runaway trying to find her mother who abandoned her earlier.

Geese – Dina moves to Tokyo and joins with other young people from different countries as they try to survive by working and helping each other.

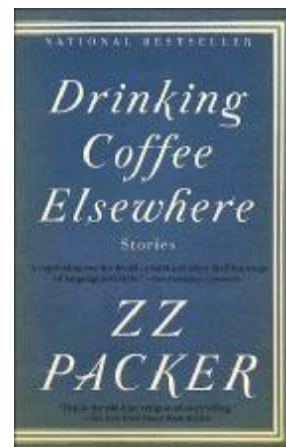
Doris Is Coming – Story of Doris, a high school student, about how she deals with the church predicted end of the world in 1961 and her one-person sit-in at a coffee shop.

A Few Facts about the Author

- ü “ZZ” is a nickname; her real name is Zuwenia.
- ü She was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1973.
- ü She lives in the Bay Area.
- ü She is a graduate of Yale (BA), Johns Hopkins University (MA) and the Iowa Writers Workshop (MFA).
- ü She has won various writing awards including the Whiting Writers' Award.
- ü In a 2003 interview with Barnes & Noble, she stated that Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* most influenced her life.

As you read, think about ...

- Ø Who are your favorite characters? Why?
- Ø Who are your least favorite characters? Why?
- Ø Which is your favorite story? Why?
- Ø Which is your least favorite story? Why?
- Ø Are there any common themes or characters throughout the stories?
- Ø Many of the protagonists (main characters) have struggles of identity and interacting with others. How does this lead you to view these characters? What do they learn from their struggles?
- Ø In an interview in *The New Yorker* online, ZZ Packer states: “I do think that by the end of the story [the characters] come to a point at which they are beginning to become true to themselves.” Do you agree and if yes, for which character(s)?
- Ø The stories deal with characters who “live their life straddling two worlds.” (Penguin Group) How do you think the characters manage this challenge and why might some do better than others? What do the characters learn from their experiences?
- Ø How does religion factor into some of the stories? Is there a common theme in how it is used?
- Ø Would you have written different endings for any of the stories? If yes, how?
- Ø Why might the author have included the quote from author Alex Haley at the beginning of the book?



You can also join an online discussion at www.litminds.org.

For more information on the book and fall events visit www.sjsu.edu/reading/

