

Naked Study Guide

Naked by David Sedaris

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Contents

Naked Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chipped Beef and A Plague of Tics.....	4
Get Yer Ya Ya's Out and Next of Kin.....	6
Cyclops and The Women's Open.....	8
True Detective and Dix Hill.....	10
I Like Guys and Drama Bug.....	12
Dinah the Christmas Whore and Planet of the Apes.....	14
The Incomplete Quad and C.O.G.....	16
Something for Everyone and Ashes.....	18
Naked.....	20
Characters.....	21
Objects/Places.....	23
Themes.....	26
Style.....	28
Quotes.....	30
Topics for Discussion.....	32

Plot Summary

Naked by David Sedaris is a collection of seventeen humor-laden essays. In true Sedaris fashion, each essay is a vignette detailing some traumatic and bizarre experience in the author's life. Although the vignettes stand up on their own, the collection gives a deep insight into Sedaris' mind and personality. Regardless of a person's beliefs or sexual preference, Sedaris' work consistently strikes the reader's funny bone. Even though many of the experiences Sedaris details are outlandish, everyone can recall a traumatic elementary school experience or embarrassment at the inappropriate antics of a family member.

There are many stories from the author's childhood, portraying a gruff father and a hard drinking, smoking mother. The mother, Sharon Sedaris, appears in more of the essays and one becomes acquainted with the woman's peculiar style of parenting. There always seems to be a cigarette and cocktail in hand, backed up with sarcastic and at times, cruel humor. It becomes readily apparent that the Sedaris children take after their beloved mother.

There are six Sedaris children; David is number two in the mix. Many stories involved the other Sedaris children, showing that each has a sense of sarcastic humor and intelligence. Aside from the parents, the two most talked about siblings are Lisa and Amy. The girls seem to become their brother's partner in crime and vice versa, even if it is an unwilling partnership. In *Dinah the Christmas Whore*, Lisa commandeers David into rescuing Dinah from an abusive boyfriend when David would much rather retreat to his room and spend the evening aligning the items on his dresser. As the children grow up, Amy and David become partners in business as well, exploiting their many childhood traumas and turning them into raucous comedy.

Through the vignettes, Sedaris manages to give the reader an insight into a childhood filled with peculiar and erratic behaviors and experiences involving a cast of bizarre characters. It is obvious that Sedaris loves to exaggerate but the stories are written so that one cannot tell where the story ends and the embellishment begins.

The most somber piece in the book is the story titled "Ashes." The piece recounts Lisa's marriage and Mrs. Sedaris' death caused by cancer. The Sedaris family is not an affectionate one and the children's need to appreciate their mother makes it difficult to weather the situation. Mrs. Sedaris wants everything to be as normal as possible but it is too difficult for the children to realize that they will never be all together ever again.

The experiences in *Naked* are often strange and fascinating, often traumatic, and always very humorous.



Chipped Beef and A Plague of Tics

Chipped Beef and A Plague of Tics Summary and Analysis

Chipped Beef is a short vignette about David's desire to be wealthy and acting as such even though his family is middle class.

At one point, the Sedaris sisters are kidnapped, and the family decides to allow the kidnappers to keep the girls since it is beneath their character to negotiate with terrorists.

Mrs. Sedaris yells at David to stop dressing up the cat because the costume makes the feline look like a French whore. Their last cat had been hit by a car, but David's mother claims it was suicide. The cat couldn't stand David any more and decided to end it all.

Attending church is an event for the Sedaris family, although the family is so incredibly attractive that no one pays any attention to the reverend or the sermon. Eventually, the family has to move to the front pew, their backs to the rest of the congregation. It is the only hope the reverend has of regaining the stage. After all, riding his Harley into church does not seem to have any impact.

David is convinced that he was abducted as a small child. His true parents are wealthy beyond belief and somehow the boy has been saddled with middle class comfort. Mrs. Sedaris says as shocking as it is, the boy belongs to her. Even David's attempts of loitering outside the grocery store in order to be picked up by someone else fail.

Mrs. Sedaris is inconsolable, pregnant for the sixth time. David becomes concerned and devoted to his mother in light of her latest crisis. After receiving a written guarantee that he will always have a private room and a twenty dollar payment, David vows to help.

A Plague of Tics is devoted to David's lifetime struggle with a myriad of tics. David is chastised by his third grade math teacher, Miss Chestnut, for licking the classroom light switch. Apparently, David is obsessed with this particular light switch, and licks it no less than 28 times during class. David also likes to "tap" himself on the forehead with his shoes, often leaving tread marks in their wake. The teacher points out shoes are meant to be worn on the feet to protect one's soles from harm, not to smack oneself on the forehead. In theory, David understands this but his compulsion is simply too great to be controlled. David counts his steps home, and along the way must touch or lick a variety of items, always in the same manner. Even when home David continues to count steps, and every 4th, 8th, and 12th carpeted step must be kissed, regardless of the presence of cat hair.

The teachers begin to make appearances at the Sedaris home, speaking to Mrs. Sedaris about David's peculiar tics. In Mrs. Sedaris, the teachers find a sarcastic and



somewhat sympathetic comrade whose solutions often revolve around a bottle of scotch and an endless supply of cigarettes.

As David grows older, the tics increase and eventually cause him to become an outcast. The touching of the nose to various objects, rocking, eye rolling, and tiny voices get further out of control and regardless of all the threats by his parents, David cannot stop.

Despite terrible grades in school, David goes off to college. David finds living with a roommate extremely difficult, particularly since he has to curb or even stop many of his tics. He makes up an excuse to his roommate that doctors instructed him to jerk his head about to shrink the size of an inoperable brain tumor and to roll his eyes back into his head in order to strengthen the fibers of his cornea.

Taking up smoking seems to be the answer to David's prayers. While harmful, the author sees that it is more socially acceptable to smoke rather than sticking butter knives into sockets or practicing any of his other tics. While David realizes he probably should be on medication, the cigarettes calm him and give him excuses to jump up out of his chair, play with lighters, and occupy his hands. After many years of being considered a freak with dangerous habits, David decides that smoking is not all that bad.



Get Yer Ya Ya's Out and Next of Kin

Get Yer Ya Ya's Out and Next of Kin Summary and Analysis

Every summer the Sedaris family visits family, including Ya Ya, Mr. Sedaris' widowed mother, David's grandmother. Ya Ya is a Greek immigrant who cherishes her heritage and never recovers from the fact that her only son marries outside the culture. Mrs. Sedaris hates Ya Ya.

Mr. Sedaris grows up at Ya Ya's feet as she and her husband operate a dump of a magazine and candy store. David's description of Ya Ya's cooking is vivid and hilarious, referring to the use of a black kettle that resembles a cauldron and foods tasting like they were prepared a week prior and maintaining the taste of a musty trunk.

Ya Ya is only concerned with the strength of the children, as if they will return to the Greek village of her childhood to work the land. Ya Ya adores and dotes on the boys of the family and all but ignores the daughters. This is fine by David and his brother, who come to view Ya Ya as a walking ATM.

A tragic accident leaves Ya Ya with a broken hip and moving into the Sedaris home. Ya Ya is used to her own style of cooking and is often caught raiding the neighbor's yard for dandelions, weeds, and other items that can stewed or boiled.

Eventually, Ya Ya is diagnosed with diabetes. Mrs. Sedaris becomes Ya Ya's caretaker, but when her ailments become too great, Mrs. Sedaris wants Ya Ya to move to a nursing home. Mr. Sedaris will not hear of it - the Greeks simply do not do that. David surmises that it is because they are too cheap.

After Mrs. Sedaris inherits a large sum of money from a great aunt, she begins to plan her new life as a divorcee without the burden of Ya Ya. Realizing that this is an ultimatum, Mr. Sedaris moves Ya Ya into a private facility, then to a less upscale facility where she inherits a crazy roommate that the children come to adore. During David's second year of college, Ya Ya dies. Although Mr. Sedaris grieves the passing of his mother, the rest of the family is simply relieved.

Next of Kin is the name of a book David discovers at the age of thirteen in the woods behind the Sedaris house. The book is filled with the lurid details of a middle class family's deviant sexual behavior, including swinging, incest, and sexual activity with strangers and hired workers. As a thirteen-year-old boy, David is enthralled with the book. He shares the book with eleven-year-old Gretchen, who suspects that Mrs. Sedaris is having an illicit affair with the potato chip salesman and that Mr. Sedaris has obviously experienced intimate relations with all of the tellers at the bank. Ten-year-old Amy gets the book next and begins to use it in an after school class for imaginary students. Mrs. Sedaris eventually gets the book and enjoys it as much as her children.



After another reading, David decides that the book has to be taken out of the house. However, like "an outgrown sweater," it can be of use to someone else and should not be destroyed. The author takes the book to a local grocery store and pitches it into the bed of a truck parked outside. The truck's owner leafs through the book, looks around to make sure he is not being watched, then slides the book into his back pocket and drives away.



Cyclops and The Women's Open

Cyclops and The Women's Open Summary and Analysis

Tiffany Sedaris throws a pencil at David, hitting him in the eye. The damage is minimal and has not affected the eye, but Tiffany is so traumatized by Mr. Sedaris's warnings and guilt trips that she cannot even pick up a dull crayon without bursting into tears.

The Cyclops refers to a boy from Mr. Sedaris's childhood. As a parable, Mr. Sedaris warns his children about the hazards of shooting a beebee gun, since a mishap with such a gun caused his childhood friend, Frank, to lose an eye and spend the rest of his life as a Cyclops. This story is only the first of many used to discourage the Sedaris children from dangerous behaviors. Each story details a friend who lost a part of his body due to seemingly harmless activities.

After many years of hearing these stories, the Sedaris children began to wonder if their father had any friends who were not blind or maimed in some horrific way.

Although he is convinced that his eldest son will be mugged and maimed in Manhattan, Mr. Sedaris eventually visits David in New York. As father and son stroll down the street, Mr. Sedaris taunts and insults other pedestrians, much to David's dismay. In upscale restaurants, Mr. Sedaris snaps his fingers at waiters and makes demands. David tells his father a story of a friend who lost an arm snapping his fingers at a waiter.

Lou Sedaris is obsessed with golf. He tricks David and Lisa into attending a PGA tournament. David and Lisa realize they've been duped again. With the kids along, Lou can push his way to the front of the crowd, saying that the kids need to be able to see the action. One of the ploys used by Lou is to have one of the kids search for the golf masters' displaced tees which he keeps in a fishbowl on the bedroom dresser and views as good luck charms. Somehow it seems acceptable for a kid to wander onto the green, an action strictly forbidden to adults.

Lisa begins to feel ill and tries to convince Lou to take them home, but Lou refuses. Finally, there is a noticeable blood stain on Lisa's white culottes, although her father still doesn't seem terribly upset. Instead, Lou approaches a nearby woman and asks her to help Lisa. The woman is not pleased with Lou and treats him with disdain.

After the tournament, David and Lou go back to the Porsche to find Lisa in the back seat, her face and lap covered in golf towels. When Lou starts to say something, Lisa snaps at him, using strong profanity, something that shocks them all. Lou just chalks it up to "lady problems".

The only Sedaris child to ever show a slight interest in golf is Paul, the youngest child. Paul just likes the greens where he can sit and take acid and roll over golf carts.



Before Mrs. Sedaris dies, she creates a special videotape for Lisa. The two had spent many hours together, drinking wine and watching old black and white movies in the kitchen. Eventually, Lisa is emotionally prepared to watch the selections so carefully chosen by her mother. Finally settled and looking forward to watching some of their favorite movies, Lisa sits down to the opening credits of *Double Indemnity*. Before the first scene can begin, the tape switches over to Greg Norman, who is preparing to putt.



True Detective and Dix Hill

True Detective and Dix Hill Summary and Analysis

Mrs. Sedaris and Lisa are obsessed with detectives, watching crime shows, admiring the dark characters, and solving tangled plot lines. The rest of the Sedaris family has no choice but to tolerate this obsession. Although the Sedaris women have become adept at solving crimes, both are baffled when a shocking crime strikes the Sedaris household. Someone has taken to substituting the bath towels for toilet paper. Although the criminal is never caught because the shenanigans are beneath the abilities of the Sedaris detectives, the problem is solved by replacing the fudge brown linens with stark white replacements.

One day, Mr. Sedaris confronts the family with another mystery. Someone has stolen a sock full of silver Liberty quarters from his dresser. David is the prime suspect when a mechanical pencil that used to be in his father's dresser appears in his room. Unable to figure out how to clear his name, David takes a page from the Fugitive's book and dyes his hair with black shoe polish. Unfortunately, David soon learns that shoe polish laden hair does not blow in the breeze, and when it dries it takes on the characteristics of cement.

In an attempt to catch the real thief, David spends the afternoon hiding in his parents' closet. The only thing he witnesses is his mother donning a wig and, assuming a different personality, standing in front of the mirror talking to herself. He escapes, then washes his hair three times to remove the shoe polish, knowing that Mr. Sedaris will want to know who is responsible for the shoe polish staining all of his suits and coats.

Dix Hill refers to the Dorothea Dix Sanitarium, a mental institution located on the outskirts of Raleigh, North Carolina. The Sedaris children are fascinated with Dix Hill because of the tall tales of madness that lurks within the complex of gothic buildings. The worst thing anyone can say about another resident of Raleigh is that he has a relative living in Dix Hill.

The summer after David finishes seventh grade, Mr. and Mrs. Sedaris announce that until the children are old enough to get jobs they will spend their summers doing community service. Lisa chooses to work as a candy striper at a local hospital while David arranges to volunteer at Dix Hill. Part of David's fascination with Dix Hill is that his maternal grandfather was taken away by men in actual white coats because the man was suffering from a severe case of DTs associated with advanced alcoholism. He received thirty-seven electroshock therapy treatments and never drank again. He also almost never spoke, and baked hundreds of apple pies. David feels sorry for his mother's side of the family, who seems to suffer from fragile mental health. The author describes the family's coat of arms as picturing a bottle of scotch and a tumor.



Sharon tries to talk David out of volunteering at Dix Hill. David finds that people typically do not volunteer at Dix Hill and the receptionist thinks he is an escaped patient.

David's time is spent as an orderly, helping to carry patients to and from the infirmary. The author describes the extreme actions of some of the patients, from a man wearing a turban made of urine soaked towels, to being bitten by an old woman with three teeth, and people who will say anything to get out of their rooms.

David volunteers over subsequent summers, moving from ward to ward. When the author is in college, he chooses to volunteer at another state hospital. This one is different—David remains in the same ward, the result being that he gets to know the patients. At times, David loses patience and wants to scream at the people to get better. Nothing seems to help.

Many years later, David returns to Dix Hill with a friend. The friend had been dining with her boyfriend in a restaurant when the boyfriend became aggressive and began pelting hush puppies at a nearby table. The boyfriend appears, bloated from drugs and in obvious distress. The girlfriend makes empty assurances while patting his bruised knuckles.



I Like Guys and Drama Bug

I Like Guys and Drama Bug Summary and Analysis

David realizes he is a homosexual when he is in the eighth grade. As teachers compare the future integration of colored people into the school system with homosexuals, David begins a long journey of overcompensating to hide his true feelings toward other guys. David takes part in calling other people derogatory names to keep from being suspected, but he lives in fear of being discovered.

It is obvious to David that there are other gay guys in the school. They seem to form a secret club where none of the members dare to communicate or be in another's company for fear of being detected.

During the summer, David and Lisa are sent to a month-long summer camp in Greece. Lisa is excited and David is horrified. Lisa befriends a hardened girl from Queens, and imitates her behavior throughout the summer. David attempts to find a friend as well and eventually becomes friends with Jason, the boy who sleeps in the bunk underneath.

The experience of sharing a room is just another circumstance that makes David extremely uncomfortable. As a consequence, David is unable to have a bowel movement the entire time he is in Greece.

Over the next few weeks, he and Jason become closer friends and discover that they share a mutual attraction. In an effort to prevent the inevitable, David and Jason find reasons to avoid being alone together until one day it happens. A friendly wrestling match turns into David's first sexual experience with another guy. After that, the boys find excuses to be alone together and to invent their own type of modern love.

In an effort to hide their relationship, David and Jason resort to name calling and try to deliver "proof" that the other is gay. The other boys are doing the same as well and the ploy seems to work. The relationship continues until camp ends and the Sedaris children go back to Raleigh. At the airport, Lisa reverts to her old self while David knows he will never be the same again.

School starts in the fall, and David and his sisters will attend an integrated school. At least the new science teacher, who is black, can do a good imitation of a faggot.

In high school, David is introduced to Shakespeare by a visiting actor. For the next few months, David speaks in old English, referring to the chicken dinner as roasted fowl; his mother is a wife and wench; beverages are served in flagons. Mrs. Sedaris is convinced that this new obsession is merely a phase while David thinks he has found a calling.

David's friend, Lois, is also bitten by the drama bug and together they worship the traveling actor and become involved in a play. While David studies incessantly, Lois attends keg parties and sleeps with fellow thespians. Eventually, David grows



disenchanted with the stage. He's furious when his lines are cut and he's all but ignored while Lois gets everything she wants.

David begins to become isolated from the other actors. One night, after a performance, David calls his mother to pick him up since Lois has other plans with the cast and crew. David's mother assures the author that he was the best one on the stage even though his lines consisted of a mere three syllables. It is at that moment David realizes that his mother's words, while well intended, are little more than lies. What is acting more than clever lying? The art of motherhood outweighs the talents of all great actors.



Dinah the Christmas Whore and Planet of the Apes

Dinah the Christmas Whore and Planet of the Apes Summary and Analysis

David and Lisa get jobs in cafeterias. Lisa works in a has-been cafeteria, while David works in a new cafeteria in a new shopping center. David enjoys his work as a dishwasher. The work keeps his hands occupied while allowing his mind to wander, dreaming up scenarios for a future television series in which David will travel the country with a proboscis monkey.

David decides to become friendly with convicts on the staff, believing that each must have come up with some brilliant realizations while in prison. The author is saddened to learn that this theory is untrue, that each convict seems to be as stupid and unenlightened as the day he was arrested.

The holiday season approaches and David decides that this is the year he will boycott Christmas. The Sedaris family decides to draw names instead of buying presents for everyone. Lisa draws David's name; he knows he will receive a well intentioned but crappy gift.

On Christmas Eve, a woman calls on the phone for Lisa. After the phone call, Lisa grabs David and drives to a run-down neighborhood. Lisa storms into an apartment and is confronted by a large drunk man who tries to prevent her from going into the bedroom where there is a woman crying. Lisa throws the man to the ground, kicks him, and heads for the bedroom.

It is immediately obvious that the woman, Dinah, is a prostitute that Lisa befriended at work. Lisa lectures Dinah about staying with a man who abuses her and about drinking since it can ruin her work release program, then says that she will take Dinah home—to the Sedaris house.

David informs his mother that Dinah is a whore, but Mrs. Sedaris's reaction is to treat Dinah like any other guest, and offers her a cocktail. The Sedaris children wake up and meet Dinah, whom they adore. No one cares who she is or what she has done. Mr. Sedaris raises a fuss about the late hour but is kept from the kitchen because it might ruin his Christmas present. Meanwhile, the whole family giggles at the deception.

As the morning approaches, David realizes that the best present in the world could not make him happier than knowing that the Sedaris family is the only one in the neighborhood with a prostitute in their kitchen.



Planet of the Apes begins with David going to a movie theater to see the film Planet of the Apes for the ninth time. After the movie, David's father doesn't pick him up, so he hitchhikes home in the rain, something he thoroughly enjoys.

In college, David meets Veronica, a girl who encourages the hitchhiking fever, and convinces David to come to California. David and Randolph, a friend from school, set off on their journey. The most notable ride the boys receive is from two guys called Starsky and Hutch. The boys drive their Jeep like they are being chased. After a traumatic ride, David and Randolph manage to get away.

San Francisco is nothing like David imagined. Instead of the streets being filled with romantic poets on a quest, they are crowded with men in studs and leather chaps. David stays for three months. Eventually, David and Veronica hitchhike to Oregon to pick apples and pears, visit Canada and head back east. The two of them go their separate ways and David decides to hike to Kent State and is offered rides by a number of people, including a lunatic named T.W., who gets drunk and holds a gun to David's head. After a terrifying episode, David manages to escape and catches a ride with college kids the rest of the way to Ohio.

David loses his trusting side and begins to suspect all people of lying and being crazy. There are more episodes of bad hitchhiking experiences, ending with a ride from a man who threatens to kill David. He never hitchhikes again, but he also never learns to drive.

Riding with a friend one day, David sees a man hitchhiking. In order to keep from being rude to the hitchhiker, David pretends to play with the radio.



The Incomplete Quad and C.O.G.

The Incomplete Quad and C.O.G. Summary and Analysis

David fantasizes about college life, envisioning a fabulously wealthy roommate who will take him home for holidays and vacations. If nothing else, David desperately wants to go down to the quad and meet fellow classmates with similar highbrow fantasies. The quad David ends up with is much different.

The Incomplete Quad refers to a girl David shares a room with while in college. The room assignment the author receives is at a dorm used primarily by people with disabilities. The college supports a state program that provides a free room to any student willing to share a place with someone who is handicapped in some way. David has one disabled roommate who returns home, so David moves in with Peg, a fun girl who suffers from a degenerative nerve disease.

People in wheelchairs are often invisible and David discovers that people pushing wheelchairs are also invisible. Taking advantage of this fact, Peg and David begin a life of crime, pilfering a number of items, from lobster tails to books and records. People in the stores never utter a word. The pranks go further when David and Peg choose to hitchhike to North Carolina to visit the Sedaris family, as David and Peg use the kindness of strangers to get them meals, rides, and more.

The Sedarises are wary of Peg and amazed at David's dedication in taking care of his friend. Mrs. Sedaris knows better, and before the pair leaves, she scolds David and gives him bus fare back to Ohio.

Eventually, David moves to San Francisco. After a while, Peg moves in with David, who soon finds out how much different life will be out in the real world living with someone with a disability.

Over the years, David and Peg stay in touch. At some point, Peg undergoes a religious transformation. When Peg speaks of the kindness of strangers who helped them on their journeys, David reminds his friend that the whole time they lied and made fun of the people for their pity and foolishness. Peg points out that people are more kind than foolish. Peg is able to realize this fact before she dies, while David claims it takes many more years for him to reach the same conclusion.

C.O.G. starts with David taking a trip from North Carolina to Oregon. Along the way, David wonders why he thought the bus trip would be a good experience, as he experiences a host of negative characters he's forced to share the journey with.

David and Veronica work in an apple orchard belonging to a man named Hobbs, a job to which David returns. Without Veronica, the work is tedious and lonely. Eventually,



David gets a job in an apple picking plant. Although untrained, he's promoted to sorter, much to the chagrin of the middle-aged women who resent David and ridicule him for being smart. Curly, the forklift operator, says that the women are just jealous.

One night Curly invites David to go home to the trailer where he lives with his mother. The first sign of trouble is when Curly kicks the dog and claims it is just a game they like to play. The trailer is relatively clean but bears an odor that is the worst David has ever experienced. The next big shock is when Curly shows David his bedroom. Present on the shelves and on every flat surface lie a massive collection of artificial penises.

Curly is extremely aggressive and tries to have sex with David, who manages to escape. He informs the packing plant that he has been offered a teaching position at Yale. Although he is ready to leave Oregon, he meets Jonathan Combs, C.O.G. (Child of God) who offers him a job as clockmaker.

Curly reappears and attacks David once again. Just as Curly is winning, David screams out that he is a Christian and what Curly wants to do is not right. The act works and Curly leaves.

Much to David's relief, Jonathan fires him.



Something for Everyone and Ashes

Something for Everyone and Ashes Summary and Analysis

One day David discovers a \$50 bill, packed with cocaine. David thinks he has hit the jackpot. This is when the author decides that it is possible to find money every day and not have to work. On the second day, David finds six cents. The days that follow are not any better. On the day that the only find is a peanut, David knows he must get a job.

David is finally hired by a woman named Uta who needs an apartment painted. David meets Dupont, the other worker at Uta's apartment. Dupont is a black man who acts like a subservient slave from days gone by, but it's just a front. Over the next few weeks, David likes Dupont less and less, as Dupont has bad work habits and insults David's work habits and behaviors to Uta. The tables begin to turn when Dupont tells Uta that David is gay. Shortly after, David figures out that Uta is a lesbian.

One day while Uta is out, Dupont enters the apartment and asks David for \$20. David says truthfully that he does not have \$20. Dupont takes the money from Uta's wallet. David does not stop him, and later is ashamed. He makes a fast trip to the bank, withdrawing the amount of money Dupont stole. Uta and her friend return earlier than expected and David waits until they are in the other room to replace the money. Uta returns to the room where she catches David in her wallet. The story ends with David thinking of a way to explain.

"Ashes" tends to be less humorous than the other essays because it deals with Sharon Sedaris's bout with lung cancer and her untimely death.

As children, the Sedaris siblings make a pact never to get married. It is all right with the girls, who prefer to play "reformatory" as opposed to house. To Mrs. Sedaris, having a husband is a sign of social status, a type of normalcy. The Sedaris daughters do not want to be bothered. Mr. Sedaris is not keen on the idea of grandchildren but in part shares his wife's views on marriage.

After living with a boyfriend for many years, Lisa Sedaris decides to get married. Bob, the boyfriend, gets along well with the family. After a while, the siblings choose to accept that Lisa has broken the non-marriage pact. Two weeks before the wedding, Sharon Sedaris announces that she has inoperable lung cancer.

Lisa marries on a mountain top in North Carolina. It is the last time that the entire family will be together. Everyone knows Sharon's time is nearing an end. Mrs. Sedaris is clearly ready to have the ordeal end and makes the kids promise to cremate her. She suggests that perhaps the kids can take her ashes to fancy hotels and stash them in ashtrays.

The last night the family is together, the kids sit outside pondering their future without their mother. Since she has gone to her room early, they assume she wants to be alone. What they do not realize until much later is that she would have wanted nothing more than not to be alone.

Naked

Naked Summary and Analysis

As a joke to torment Paul, the youngest Sedaris child, David consistently advocates activities that his brother can do while naked. In yet another prank, David calls a nudist colony to have a brochure sent to Paul. David thinks it is the perfect practical joke.

After having a fight with his long-term partner, David decides that he is willing to make a visit to the nudist colony. This decision is completely out of character for David and constant anxiety only makes matters worse. He packs, and sets off for the resort, which he learns is no longer called a nudist colony since the term has a bad connotation. In David's mind, naked is naked.

There are rules about proper conduct at the resort, including always sitting on a towel, and no body jewelry beyond earrings and rings are permitted. In most areas, the visitors are nude. Exceptions are outlined.

At first, David finds it very difficult to remove his clothes. During his week-long stay, he becomes more comfortable with being naked. He is surprised to learn that after a few days there comes a form of acceptance and loss of the need to hide behind one's clothing.

As David leaves the resort and waits for the bus, he strolls down the street looking at people in their attire. Suddenly, he has a realization. Before, when clothing was optional, things were a bit scary. Now that clothing is mandatory, David resents it.



Characters

David Sedaris

David Sedaris (1956 -)

Time Magazine's 2001 Humorist of the Year, David Sedaris is a well known satirist and essay writer. Most know him from NPR's American Life, where the author's original radio pieces have aired for many years. The humorist's works include a number of collected personal essays, which have appeared in best selling books "Me Talk Pretty One Day" and "Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim." Sedaris has also been nominated for 2 Grammy awards for his spoken word material.

Born in New York and raised in North Carolina, David Sedaris is a cut to the quick kind of humorist. The author's works, particularly his essays, are self-effacing, revealing, and hilarious. Much of Sedaris' work relays stories of his family—parents and five siblings—and their unique relationships. Many may think that Sedaris writes without censorship and his memories and experiences are sometimes politically incorrect and slightly risqué. Others applaud the author for candor and realism.

Together with his sister, Amy Sedaris, the author has written a number of successful plays that have appeared in prestigious locations such as Lincoln Center. Sedaris' new collection of essays and fables, "When You Are Engulfed in Flames," is set to be released in June 2008.

Amy Sedaris

Amy Sedaris was born in Endicott, New York and raised in the suburbs of Raleigh, North Carolina. She is the daughter of David and Sharon Sedaris and one of the six Sedaris children.

Amy is an accomplished actress, author, and comedian. Known for her work as part of the Talent Family with her brother, humorist David Sedaris, Amy has co-written a number of plays that have been performed in such noted locations as Lincoln Center.

Amy's training as a comedian began with a stint in the famed Second City Troupe in Chicago, in addition to her work as a humorist. Amy Sedaris has appeared in a wide array of television shows and feature films. Her filmography includes the feature films Elf, Shrek the Third, Bewitched, and Maid in Manhattan. Television appearances include My Name is Earl, Monk, Strangers with Candy, and Sex in the City.

In 2006, Amy became a best selling author with her lighthearted tribute to cooking titled, I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence. Amy also operates a home business in the form of Dusty Food Cupcakes, a cupcake and cheese ball enterprise,



In a 2006 appearance on Late Night with David Letterman, Amy announced that her imaginary boyfriend, Ricky, had recently been murdered and she now lives with his ghost.

Miss Katherine Chestnut

David's third grade math teacher and the first faculty member to visit the Sedaris home.

Ya-Ya

"Ya-ya" is David Sedaris' paternal grandmother who lived in New York and eventually moved in with the Sedaris family.

Mrs. Sedaris

Sharon Sedaris is David's hard-drinking, chain-smoking, sarcastic mother.

Mr. Sedaris

David Sedaris is the author's traditional Greek father who works at IBM.

Lisa Sedaris

David's oldest sister and frequent confidant.

Dinah

Dinah is the prostitute rescued by Lisa Sedaris.

T.W.

T.W. is the man who picked up David hitchhiking then tried to kill him.

Randolph Feathers

Randolph Feathers is a college friend of David's who went hitchhiking cross-country.

Veronica

Veronica is a college friend of David's who shares his love of hitchhiking.



Objects/Places

Sedaris Home

The Sedaris home is the center of many of the essays in *Naked*. Located in North Hills, a suburb of Raleigh, North Carolina, the Sedaris home is often the site of much activity.

When the Sedaris family first moved to North Carolina from New York, they were forced to live in a rented house. It was a decent house but one that Sharon Sedaris referred to as her own little piece of hell. After their house was built, the Sedarises settled into what would be their homestead forever.

One of the criteria for David was to have a private room. It was simple enough at first since David was the only boy for many years. The four girls shared rooms and were forced to rearrange once Ya-ya moved into the basement bedroom to recover from a broken hip.

As with most homes, the kitchen is often the hub of the home. It was in the kitchen that Lisa and Mrs. Sedaris spent many hours watching old movies, talking, and drinking wine. A lot of drinking went on in the kitchen; the Sedarises thought that no ill could escape the cure of a well made cocktail.

The children eventually left home. David returned several times after adventures across the country. In solitude, Lou Sedaris spent his many hours in front of the big screen television watching golf.

Like many homes with many children, the Sedaris house was always open. This was proven repeatedly, but especially in the case of Dinah the Christmas Whore who needed a place to hide from an abusive boyfriend.

Raleigh, North Carolina

Most of David's existence is spent in the Raleigh suburb of North Hills. The family moved to Raleigh from Endicott, New York when David was seven years old. The move came about because IBM transferred Lou Sedaris to another facility.

David believes that Raleigh is a nice place to grow up. It is a city with a small town feel, one that reassures David as he experiments with hitchhiking. The small town feel does offer its own type of problems in that everyone knows everyone else. Childhood antics are widely known and Sharon Sedaris becomes friendly with all of David's teachers, much to the boy's dismay.

The author states that the worst thing that could be said about any resident of his hometown is that they had a relative living in the Dorothea Dix Sanitarium, also known as Dix Hill. All other quirks and sins seemed to be pardonable.



Although David leaves home to attend a state college and eventually, Kent State University in Ohio, there is always a place for him in Raleigh. David's eagerness to break away takes him to many places including San Francisco, Oregon, Chicago and New York. Knowing that Raleigh is still there offers great comfort.

Grandmother's House in New York

David's grandmother, Ya-ya lives in an apartment located above the family candy store in New York. According to everyone who visits the apartment is a dump, something that in Sharon's mind explains why Ya-ya's goldfish committed suicide.

San Francisco

David lived in San Francisco for three months after being lured there by his good friend Veronica.

Chicago

David lived in Chicago for many years before settling in New York.

New York

New York City is where David finally made a home with long-time partner Hugh.

Kent State University

Kent State was the second college David attended, mainly because the killings provided good conversation starters.

Math Class

A Plague of Tics begins with David's experiences in Miss Chestnut's third grade math class where it is impossible for the boy to be still.

Oregon

Veronica and David spend time in Odell, Oregon picking apples. Later, David returns alone to have many harrowing and bizarre experiences.



Greyhound Bus

David often takes the Greyhound bus when hitchhiking becomes impossible or dangerous. C.O.G. details some of the stories surrounding one cross country jaunt.

Dinah's House

Dinah the Christmas Whore lives in a part of town that even criminals would try to escape. The streets are dark and dirty and the apartment in which Dinah lives is not fit for roaches.

Nashville, Tennessee

Nashville is one of the locations David and Veronica travel to during their hitchhiking exploits.

Gatlinburg, Tennessee

Gatlinburg is one of the locations David and Veronica travel to during their hitchhiking exploits. The purpose is to visit fake Indians.

Cherokee, North Carolina

Cherokee is a town that is comprised of a Cherokee Indian reservation.



Themes

Nervous Tics

A Plague of Tics details David's childhood nervous habits and compulsions. If properly diagnosed, David believes that he had a severe case of OCD as well as juvenile Tourette Syndrome.

The compulsions are not something that David can control. There is something in the author's mind that causes him to lick Miss Chestnut's light switch 28 times, count every step to and from school, smack himself on the forehead with a shoe, and touch things with his nose, lips, tongue or index finger. The nervous tics are invasive and consume nearly all of David's mental ability. The author's grades in school prove that he spends much time on many other things than his books.

David's parents try everything to get him to stop acting strangely but nothing seems to work. The tiny voices continue to seep out unbeknownst to the author and touching his nose to the car windshield cannot be helped. Mr. Sedaris unwittingly makes it worse when he slams on the car's brakes, bloodying David's nose. That experience causes David to experiment with various forms of self-flagellation.

Rocking is also another nervous tic for David but one that he considers to be pleasurable. During his first year in college, however, David had to learn to curb his many tics, such as rolling his eyes back into his skull, lest he be thought of as strange.

In college the author takes up smoking, drinking, and drugs. Although these things are not good for his health, at least the tics have been greatly reduced.

Family

David Sedaris is the second of six children born to Lou and Sharon Sedaris. The eldest is Lisa, followed by David, Amy, Gretchen, Tiffany, and Paul.

Almost every essay in *Naked* contains some element of family life. Although the Sedaris family is sarcastic and vulgar at times, they somehow manage to exude a charm that cannot be denied. Each member of the family is funny whether or not it is intended.

The Sedaris family is not affectionate by nature and expressing affection is frowned upon. This is illustrated clearly in *Ashes* when David, deeply affected by his mother's cancer, tells her over the phone that he loves her. Sharon Sedaris' response is "I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that."

Regardless of the peculiar bond between parent and child, all of the Sedaris children cling to their mother and look to her for advice, as twisted as it may be. Mr. Sedaris



does not appear nearly as much in the essays except during *Get Yer Ya-ya's Out*, in which his mother breaks a hip and moves in with the family.

Through thick and thin, the Sedarises present a united front, willing to share with one another crazy experiences and a well made cocktail.

Being an Outcast

David Sedaris is almost always the outcast in *Naked*. From elementary school trauma in *A Plague of Tics* to an experience in *C.O.G.* where the author is ordered to repent for his homosexuality, David has mastered the art of the outcast.

Trying to fit in or simply not stand out never seems to work out for David. Dressing in a caftan and platform shoes in high school proved to be the wrong choice for trying to hide the nervous tics that plagued him. Trying to impress the middle-aged women in *C.O.G.* earned him the nickname "Einstein" instead of the admiration and respect he so desired.

When in the presence of others, David tries to think of ways to blend into the crowd. The author's skills as a chameleon are sorely lacking and oftentimes the author's behavior serves to irritate others. David often tries harder and the situation regularly turns ugly or dangerous.

David never really apologizes for who he is although the author does spend a great deal of time trying to hide his many quirks. Part of David's character is to let things happen rather than creating opportunities. This behavior may account for some of the problems; although, in the end, it all seems to work out.

Style

Perspective

Naked is a collection of essays written by author, humorist and playwright David Sedaris. Sedaris had his first big break in 1992 on National Public Radio. Sedaris eventually became a regular writer on the station's show *An American Life*.

The author is known for being smart, sarcastic, and extremely funny. *Naked* is only one of many books written by Sedaris. While the essays are generally short, each is tightly written and offers a unique insight into the humorist's life. Many of the stories are greatly embellished or are perhaps outright lies. Regardless, Sedaris finds a way to make even the most bizarre situation somewhat believable, often leaving the reader grateful to have escaped a similar fate.

Many of Sedaris' stories and experiences revolve around homosexuality and the reactions of others in various situations.

In addition to writing essays, Sedaris has co-written a number of plays with his younger sister Amy. Amy is also a comedian, actress, and author. Together, the siblings are known as the "Talent Family" and continue to work on various works for the stage.

Undoubtedly, Sedaris' many years of performing have influenced his writing, although the style remains uniquely Sedaris.

Tone

Although the seventeen essays in *Naked* are distinctly different, the tone seems to remain the same. Sedaris is well known for self-effacement and biting humor. The work never comes off as combative even when the author attempts to be defensive. On the contrary, Sedaris often comes off as defenseless, leaving the reader feeling sorry for him and the unfortunate situations that he may find himself in at times.

Sedaris does not apologize for being a snob. The constant fun poked at others, particularly those who are not very bright, gives an edge to the piece. The barbs are not necessarily meant to be mean-spirited and are often funnier than rude.

In one tale, David's friend Peg points out that people are generally more kind than foolish. David, not accepting Peg's recent religious transformation, reminds her that when they hitchhiked from Ohio to North Carolina, they lied to, took advantage of, and were mean to nearly everyone they encountered along the way. It was not until years later that Sedaris discovers that Peg was right all along.

The language Sedaris uses brings the writing to a higher level. The author is fond of descriptive terms, metaphors and analogies that brighten up even the darkest of circumstances. Sedaris makes good use of his education and love of language.

Structure

Chipped Beef and Next of Kin are the shortest essays, at six pages in length. The longest essay is C.O.G., which is 49 pages in length. The average length of an essay is 15 pages.

Each essay is relatively short and therefore is presented in one piece rather than being divided into chapters.

The essays tend to cover a lot of ground, particularly in the case of C.O.G. Although this particular story contains a lot of information, the piece remains cohesive through the use of language and repeating references used throughout. One is not likely to forget an event that happened earlier in the essay simply because Sedaris' writing style will not allow it. Elegant and vivid descriptions paint unforgettable pictures in the reader's mind, leaving one to marvel or cringe, depending on the subject matter.

The structure of the essays also allow each piece to stand on its own merit. Vignettes are often difficult to follow but Sedaris has mastered the creation of the essay so that the reader can understand not only the situation but the background that has shaped it.

Quotes

"Unlike the obsessive counting and touching, rocking was not a mandatory but a voluntary and highly pleasurable exercise," p. 12.

"Danger was everywhere and it was our father's lifelong duty to warn us," p. 47.

"After a while we began to wonder if my father had any friends who could still tie their own shoes or breathe without the aid of a respirator." p. 49.

"It seemed that anyone could solve a murder as long as he had a telephone, a few hours of spare time, and a wet bar," p. 62.

"I was at the orthodontist's office, placing a pox upon the practice of dentistry, when the visiting actor returned to the classroom," p. 98.

"Were I to receive a riding vacuum cleaner or even a wizened proboscis monkey, it wouldn't please me half as much as knowing we were the only family in the neighborhood with a prostitute in our kitchen," pp. 119-120.

"I'd sooner pick up someone waving a pistol than holding a guitar," p. 126.

"At the end of the school year I hitchhiked to San Francisco, enchanted with the idea of leading an adult life surrounded by people who could wash their own hair," p. 150.

"We hitchhiked up into Oregon, leaping out of the car after spotting snowcapped Mount Hood, a perfect symbol of majesty that was to become our lives," p. 161.

"I'd always thought of my life in terms of luck, but what if there was someone actually in charge of our destiny?" p. 189.

"During episodes of unemployment I find it rewarding to sleep as much as possible—anywhere from twelve to fourteen hours a day is a good starting point. Sleep spares you humiliation and saves money at the same time: nothing to eat, nothing to buy, just lie back and dream your life away," p. 207.

"'You take a day-old pork chop, stab it with a fork, and soak it in some vinegar and you've got yourself some good eatin',' he'd say, fingering the feathery tip of his waist length braid," p. 236.

"In terms of emotional comfort, it was our belief that no amount of physical contact could match the healing powers of a well-made cocktail," p. 242.

"It is disconcerting to talk to someone on the phone and know that he is naked," p. 251.

"He's at that age,' the woman said, and I nodded in agreement, pretending to recall the first time I had tweaked my mother's nipple while standing in the front yard of our trailer," p. 262.

Topics for Discussion

Why do you think the author's parents did not put him on medication for his numerous childhood ailments?

How many of Sedaris' tics do you think were invented or embellished? Explain.

How might David's life had changed if he had been put on medication as a child?

How would Mr. Sedaris have reacted if he had found Dinah in the kitchen with the rest of the family?

Do you think David's frantic admission to being a Christian was true or simply expressed in a moment of panic?

What might have happened if Veronica had gone back to Oregon with David?

Do you think Jonathan Combs realized that David's jade creations were really stash boxes for drugs? Explain.

How could David have handled the people on the bus in a more effective manner?

What would have changed in the Sedaris family if Sharon Sedaris had been cured of cancer?

Do you think that the author will return to the nudist colony? Explain.