

Innocent: Confessions of a Welfare Mother
by B. Morrison
Discussion Guide

1. Why didn't Barbara move in with her parents when she found herself unable to support her family? Why was she able to at the end?
2. What alternatives to welfare did Barbara consider or try? What other alternatives could she have considered?
3. Fires and the fear of fire play a large role in the story. What do they mean?
4. There are many references to sitting on the stoop. What does that image signify?
5. How are the social workers described in the book different from each other? What is the author's attitude toward social workers? Does it change?
6. Barbara has said that the book came from an essay she wrote about Arlene. Why is Arlene the heart of the story?
7. Barbara mentions that other customers in grocery stores would openly make derogatory comments when she used food stamps. Even some social workers were critical and unhelpful about her request for welfare assistance. What does this attitude reveal about our society?
8. Why do you think people feel ashamed to apply for welfare or public assistance? What would you do if you found yourself in a situation similar to Barbara's, e.g., with no job and a family to support? Would you be too ashamed to apply for assistance?
9. How does Barbara's story challenge the negative stereotype of welfare recipients? Do you think her story is typical? Did it change your view of welfare recipients?
10. How do you think the negative stereotype of welfare recipients got started and why do you think that stereotype perpetuates?
11. In light of Barbara Morrison's story, do you think welfare needs to be reformed in any way? How would you design a better welfare program? What would its goals be?
12. What does the title *Innocent* have to do with the story?