

Discussion questions for *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*

1. All travel tales involve either an external (travel through a region of the world) or internal (travel and discovery of oneself) journey of discovery. The best travel tales combine both external and internal discovery. What external discoveries did Harold make on his travels? What internal discoveries did he make?
2. Why did Harold begin his journey? At the surface, his journey began when he received a letter from Queenie Hennessy. Is this the only reason Harold began his journey? What details do we learn later in the book which prompted Harold's journey?
3. At the beginning of the book, there are hints that Harold and his wife are not getting along. As we learn of their differences, do these differences contribute to Harold's journey, and if so, in what way?
4. Along the way, Harold encounters many people who assist him, as well as some people who try to take advantage of him. What is Harold's attitude to these people, and does Harold's attitude change during his journey?
5. Why do you think that some people wanted to co-opt Harold's message along the way? What does Harold think of this? Why do some of the people who journey with Harold seem to have their own agendas, and try to force these agendas on Harold?
6. On page 90, Harold first begins to realize that part of the reason for his journey is to atone for the mistakes that he has made in his life. Through the course of his journey, does Harold atone for his mistakes? Why does Harold believe he has to atone for his mistakes?
7. As Harold's journey continues, Maureen becomes introspective. Although she doesn't make a physical journey in the same sense that Harold does, she makes an internal journey. Maureen begins to realize that she misses Harold, then she realizes that she has blamed him for a number of things he didn't cause, then she understands how she has affected Harold. Does Maureen become a different person by the end of the book, and if so, how?
8. As Harold journeys to meet Queenie, he sometimes despairs that he will not arrive, or if he does, it will be too late. He often questions whether or not his journey will have any real effect on Queenie's health. Toward the middle of the novel, a person at the hospice where Queenie is staying indicates that Queenie is getting better as a result of Harold's journey. At the end of the book we find out that Queenie can't hear or talk, and that she does not have contact with the outside world (or does she?). Does Harold's journey have some significance for Queenie? Does his journey help Queenie? Does Harold's journey help the nuns at the hospice in some way? In the end, does he repay Queenie's kindness?
9. During his journey, Harold develops the idea that he will rely on the kindness of strangers and gives up worrying about money, food and shelter. He becomes like a true pilgrim, relying on the kindness of other people. Does Harold's reliance on other people prove true? By giving up external things, does Harold become more spiritual? Does he finally atone for the mistakes he made in his life?
10. Throughout the book, we listen to Harold's inner dialogue which portrays him as requiring atonement for misdeeds. As we learn more about Harold, we see him a man who made few mistakes in life. His primary regret is not sticking up for Queenie, and allowing her to take

responsibility for his actions. Is Harold an essentially good man? Has he earned redemption through his journey?

11. At the end of the novel, Maureen and Harold are reunited and remember their earlier life. The story comes full circle, like the *Odyssey*. Is it a coincidence that the journey comes full circle to the beginning of Harold and Maureen's life? Is Harold's journey complete by the end of the novel?