

### Questions for Alice Munro's "Friend of My Youth."

1. An exercise: On your second reading of the story, go through the first two sections-- through to the top of p. 378, I mean—and mark each instance of something turning out to be other than what was said or believed or expected of it. There are many such discrepancies, as we might call them. Between the first line of the story and the top of p. 378, I count at least twelve. How many do you count? And, more important, why do you think Munro has packed the beginning of her story with so many of them? Answering this question may unlock the whole story for you.
2. Almost every character in this story is misread or misperceived in some way. Name every instance of this occurrence in the story. How are these mis-readings consistent with the central message of the story?
3. This story is structured as a story within a story. The larger, outer story concerns the author's perception of her mother. And the inner story concerns the "scandalous" marriages and sexual encounters of Robert, Ellie and Nurse Atkinson. Why do you think Munro wants such a scandal at the center of her story? It's as though she wants to arouse the worst in us, the gossip in us, we might say. Why would she want to do that?
4. It seems that towards the end of the story, the author is beginning to understand that the history of her perceptions (so often misperceptions) of her mother is intricately bound up with the social history of women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in North America. Do you agree? How is "Friend of My Youth" a historical story? Refer to the text in your answer.
5. What do you make of the last paragraph of this story, about the Cameronians? How does the revelation of their "uncompromising" faith participate in the story's mystery?
6. An innocent question: I have always wondered why Munro chose the phrase, "Friend of My Youth," as the title for her story. As you may recall, this is one of salutations with which the author's mother begins a letter to a friend late in life, after she has become sick. Why, of all the material in this rich story, would Munro select this detail as the title for the story? What does she want to communicate about the story as a whole with this title?