

Facilitator Directions for “Tale of Two Sisters”

In preparation The Facilitator may want to read the article from the *American Archivist* describing how the archives of the School Sisters of Notre Dame have been a vital part of the research on Alzheimer’s. These facilitator directions may also be modified to use with the *American Archivist* article and would be especially suited to a woman’s studies segment in history or an honors science class focusing on methodology and research. A book club may find the entire book, *Aging with Grace*, by David Snowdon, Ph.D, a worthwhile investment in understanding aging.

The Facilitator needs to download a copy of Ch. 5, “Tale of Two Sisters.” for each participant.

The Facilitator welcomes the participants and introduces the topic by saying: The School Sisters of Notre Dame have a commitment to “education on aging” through their participation in the Nun Study in which 678 SSNDs have been involved in annual evaluations for Alzheimer’s since 1992. A School Sister of Notre Dame, trained by the Nun Study staff, has met annually with each sister, assessing her ability in various areas. This data has been helpful in understanding Alzheimer’s disease. Some of this research has appeared in Dr. Snowdon’s book, *Aging with Grace*, and we are going to look at one chapter entitled, “Tale of Two Sisters.”

Let’s begin by distributing copies and asking for a few who would read aloud as we study it together. The Facilitator invites readers to take turns reading the chapter, paragraph by paragraph. After several paragraphs have been read, The Facilitator may want to interrupt the reading and ask: “What have you heard? How would you describe the personality of S. Maria? How would you describe the personality of S. Dolores? Is there anything similar about their backgrounds? Is there anything else that strikes you about either of them?”

Let’s continue the reading. At the Facilitator’s initiative, interrupt the reading and say: “What is the significance of using SSND archival material in this research? Would it have been a different study if only the sister’s medical records were available? (i.e. no autobiography, no history of educational and ministry experience, no accounts of significant accomplishments, etc.?)”

Let’s go on with the reading. At an appropriate time The Facilitator interrupts the reading and asks: “Does the spirituality of S. Maria or S. Dolores enhance this research? (A good place to introduce the factor of spirituality is after S. Dolores shares with S. Mary Margaret Johanning her desire to go to Africa. p.18.)”

After discussion continue the reading. As the reading concludes the Facilitator says: “Let’s take a few minutes and reflect silently on what we’ve read.” (pause)

The Facilitator continues: Does anyone know someone like S. Maria who is suffering from Alzheimer’s? Did any part of the reading remind you of this person’s behavior?

(This may be a sensitive issue as persons share experiences of dear ones who are no longer gainfully employed, or losing important habitual functions such as making a phone call, finding their way home, etc.)

And what about S. Dolores? Do you know older adults who continue to grow by developing new skills, challenging themselves to undertake different ministries/careers, etc.?

And what about yourself? What strikes you about engaging your own aging process? Are there any ways you have chosen to “age gracefully?” (Encourage sharing of what may seem ordinary such as regular exercise, developing a hobby, reaching out to those less fortunate, etc. Does spirituality play any role in your aging?).

When the discussion concludes The Facilitator says:

We’ve shared much today as we’ve looked at the lives of two School Sisters of Notre Dame. As we conclude our discussion I hope we’ve learned something helpful about aging and the unique methodology of the Nun Study. There are other topics under the Nun Study that offer valuable insights on aging.

We’ll end our time together with a thoughtful reading of paragraph #47 from the constitution of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. “Throughout our lives, we strive to do whatever (Jesus) tells us... This basic thrust of our lives reaches its climax in death, the moment for which life itself prepares us. In death we say our ultimate human yes to our Creator. Trusting in God’s power to bring us to fullness of life, we see death as an act of worship: in dying, we proclaim God, God, and ourselves, creatures...” Amen.