

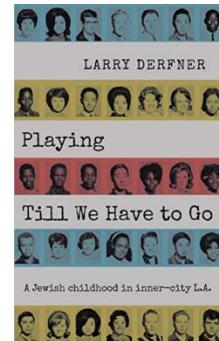
Playing Till We Have to Go: A Jewish Childhood in Inner-city L.A.

Written by Larry Derfner

Grades 9-12

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Reading Guide by Kylowna Moton, Associate Professor of English, LACCD

Questions

1. Trace the history of your neighborhood
 - a. Research the history of your neighborhood (or any neighborhood you are interested in). How far back can you go? How has the neighborhood changed—physically, demographically—over time?
 - b. Do you know anyone who has lived in your neighborhood for 20 years? 30 years? 40-50 years or more? Invite these people to share the stories of your area with your class or school
2. Larry Derfner writes *Playing till We Have to Go* as a memoir, reflecting on his life from retirement in Israel. When you walk through your neighborhood, what places and stories might you still reflect on 30, 40, 50 years from now. Start recording them now. Write, video, voice record your current neighborhood descriptions and experiences.
3. Derfner writes about growing up in a neighborhood that, for school purposes, was uniquely integrated by people with different cultural heritages for the times and made his life richer for it. Would you describe your neighborhood as more integrated or segregated? How does this integration/segregation affect the place itself and the experience of living in the place?
4. Derfner's family eventually leaves the inner city for West L.A., and he writes about this event in his life with some regret, even as he acknowledges the benefits. How did moving to a new neighborhood change Derfner's life? Are such changes still relevant—or possible—in contemporary Los Angeles?



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5. Derfner describes a community of Eastern European Jews who have escaped the Nazis & WWII or who have survived concentration camps. His depiction defies some of the stereotypes often attached to this population. What is the story of immigrants in your community? Compare the stereotypes attached to these groups with the reality. How are they similar to & different from the immigrants in *Playing Till We Have to Go*?

6.
 - a. The Derfner family and other families in *Playing Till We Have to Go* support their families with businesses they own in black neighborhoods—neighborhoods that they do not live in. The generational wealth these families began to build in the poor Black neighborhoods supports the descendants for years to come, as Derfner admits along with feelings of guilt. How is a neighborhood affected by who does and does not own property and businesses within it?
 - b. How is gentrification, while a somewhat different phenomenon, an extension of the money/ ownership patterns we saw in *Playing Till We Have to Go*?

