

## Discussion Questions for *Ladder of Years*

1. A number of dream sequences are reported by Delia. What purpose do they serve? Some are humorous. But is that the only point? —**Judy Catterton**
2. Along with dreams, is Tyler doing anything with Adrian's fascination with time-travel? At one point, Delia thinks "*She was a person without a past,*" and there are numerous references to time (Delia trying to fill time, time moving slowly) not to mention Eliza's visiting Delia and telling her, "*You know I believe that human beings live many lives*" (p.115). I saw this theme, but am not sure what Tyler was doing with it? Anything?—**Maribeth Fischer**
3. Anne Tyler utilizes phrases in parentheses often in her writing when describing things. I guess I'm just curious what everyone's opinion is on this? Why not just include it in a normal sentence?—**Elana Zambori**
4. Good writing is good writing. And *Ladder of Years* is very well written. However, it did make me consider in terms of a novel's success how much weight we as readers give to whether or not we can relate to or admire the protagonist. In the final analysis of a novel, does it matter if we dislike the character or his or her choices?—**Judy Wood**
5. Speaking of liking/admiring characters, I struggled to care about many of them. Almost every character felt cartoonishly described (Mr. Maxwell "*wore food-stained trousers belted just beneath his armpits*" (p. 36) or Belle Flint "*wore a towering dessert tray of lavish golden curls and a hot pink pantsuit*" (p. 90). Even the statue of George Pendle Bay, after whom Bay Borough is named, seems like a cartoon (p. 87). So, too with gestures. At times they felt slapstick. The way Delia was trying to pound an ice cube into the air conditioning man's thermos with the ice cube skittering across the floor... I often felt I was reading caricatures of people, not real people. Why did Tyler choose to stay so much on the surface of the character's lives? Do we give up depth and caring for the sake of cleverness and wit? It seemed so, especially when compared to the gorgeous paragraph on p.18 that described Delia's inner life so beautifully—**Maribeth Fischer/Paul Dyer**
6. Related to the above: A *New York Times* review calls this a "comedy, generous and humane" Do you agree?—**Judy Catterton**
7. Is it important to either Delia's character or the story line that we never really know why she left?—**Judy Catterton**

8. Does Tyler wait too long to have someone challenge Delia's 'walking away'? Don't we pump our fists when Delia's daughter finally blasts her with all her anger and confusion and asks her the questions we've been desperate to ask her ourselves? Does the novel lose some of its power if the reader is shaking her head halfway through?—**Judy Wood**
  
9. Why is it important (is it?) that Delia seems to be a different character at home than she is away? For example, she seems far more talkative and less secretive at home—**Judy Catterton**. Maybe along these lines, is Delia believable away from home? Is the situation believable (no one really questioning her, her own lack of worry about her children...)?—**Maribeth Fischer**