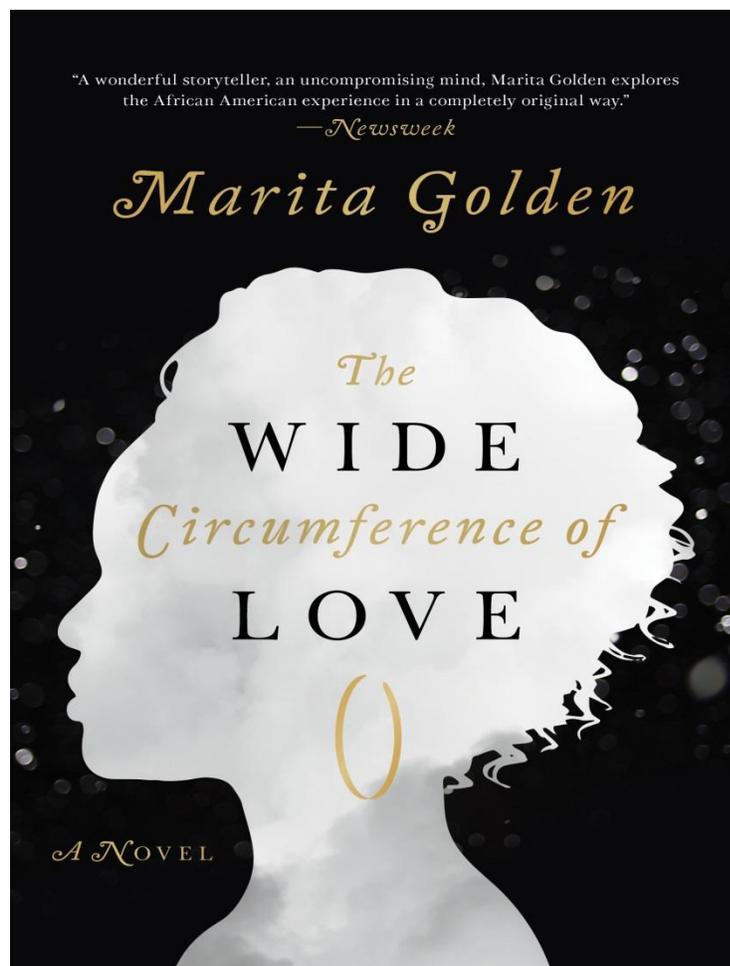


## Book Club Reading Guide for Marita Golden's *THE WIDE CIRCUMFERENCE OF LOVE*

What do you do when your spouse of many years has Alzheimer's? What happens to your marriage, your family, your own sense of self as the disease robs your loved one of his or hers?

Marita Golden, the critically acclaimed author of over ten books as well as anthologies, took on those questions as she began the research for *The Wide Circumference of Love*. What she uncovered were



both the hard numbers that will impact us all and the intuitive truths about what it means to love through this challenging disease. In the end, the novel is a meditation on love and an unflinching look at the ways in which identity, happiness, and the future are reformed in the wake of a single diagnosis.

This guide is meant to help your group navigate these dual aspects of Marita's work—the fiction and the nonfiction.

### **Book Summary—Meet the Tates:**

Diane Tate never expected to slowly lose her talented husband of thirty-years to the debilitating effects of early-onset Alzheimer's disease. As a respected family court judge, she's spent her life making tough calls, but when her sixty-eight-year-old husband's health worsens and Diane is forced to move him into an assisted living facility, it seems her world

is spinning out of control.

As Gregory's memory wavers and fades, Diane and her children must reexamine their connection to the man he once was—and learn to love the man he has become. For Diane's daughter Lauren, it means honoring her father by following in his footsteps as a successful architect. For her son Sean, it means finding a way to repair the strained relationship with his father before it's too late. Supporting her children in a changing landscape, Diane remains resolute in her goal to keep her family together—until her husband finds love with another resident of the facility. Suddenly faced with an uncertain future, Diane must choose a new path—and discover her own capacity for love.

## **Praise:**

“Golden’s redemptive novel is a tale of family survival in which love softens the brutal edges of an insidious disease.” —

***Kirkus Reviews***

“A deeply resonant and important novel that everyone should read. Marita Golden writes with unsurpassed grace and humanity about Alzheimer’s, family, the burden of memory, and the enduring power of love.” —**Julie Otsuka**, bestselling author of *The Buddha in the Attic*

“Marita Golden has written a heartwarming novel about the human capacity to love even under the most challenging of circumstances. *The Wide Circumference of Love* tells about the many dimensions of love and our courage to move forward in a life that could be ‘sullen with darkness,’ but also ‘lit with grace.’ This is a story that will linger in the heart long after the last page is read.” —**Elizabeth Nunez**, author of *Even in Paradise*

“Golden has a rare gift for the poetry of language.” —**San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle**

“A wonderful storyteller, an uncompromising mind, Marita Golden explores the African-American experience in a completely original way.” —**Newsweek**

## **About the Author:**

Golden’s writing has been earning praise for decades. Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison has said: "It is always heartening to see women step up to the writer's table. When the results are as adroit and affecting as Marita Golden's work, it is more than satisfying—it is a cause for celebration." Co-Founder of the Hurston Wright Foundation, an organization that is a resource for African American writers and annually recognizes the best of that year’s writing, Golden is the author of over a dozen works of fiction and nonfiction and a recipient of numerous awards.



## **Questions to Help the Conversation:**

1. How did you feel reading the opening chapter when Diane is getting ready to move her husband into the care facility? Were you shocked by her decision? Were you surprised by the author's description of his condition and his behavior? How do you make that decision—what is the tipping point for when it is too much to manage alone?
2. Lauren, Diane's daughter has taken on her father's firm. Do you see her decision to go into the field as really following her own passion or was it to get her father's approval? How does his illness shift her focus? How is his illness a problem for her finding her own vision in the business—or is that not an issue?
3. Sean's complicated relationship with his father is now further pushed by his father's illness. What would you tell a son like Sean? What do you think he needs to resolve the outstanding issues he has had with his father? How are sons impacted differently than daughters when a father disappears because of illness?
4. How did Diane's past affect first her decision to pursue the work she did – and her feelings about family? Was it a good idea for her to have reached out to her father's sister? Did hearing about her mother's rape and the impact it had also on her father change how she saw him? Was Gregory right to say he was disappointed in her when she said she no longer wanted to find her father?
5. Marita moves backwards and forwards in time to tell stories of Diane and Gregory's lives and courtship. What stories affected you the most?
6. One of the narrative techniques Marita uses is to let different characters tell the story—even within one chapter that perspective can shift. What did they do to your understanding of the characters? How did it change the way you read the book?
7. When Marita switches in Chapter Nine to narrating the book in the present and in Gregory's voice as he begins to realize he's inherited (possibly) the disease that killed his father, Alzheimer's were you surprised that he hadn't yet told Diane his fears? Were you surprised he turned to his brother first? How did you react to being in his shoes and experiencing that loss of memory?
8. How common do you think it is that patients at memory units fall in love? How did you feel when you read about Gregory's new love Wallis? Can there be a real betrayal in this situation? What do marriage vows mean in this situation? What did you think about Diane bringing Gregory to the hospital to see Wallis and her realizing she wished she had known who Wallis was before the illness struck?

9. Diane is very conflicted about her own developing relationship with Alan. What would you tell her about it if you were her friend? Is she right to reject his proposal? Do you know of any families who have had to accommodate a marriage that can't be broken because of an illness or a condition?
10. One of the many themes in the book is asking for help—who to go to, how to get help—from Diane's father who never got over the trauma, to Diane getting therapy or Gregory's mother confiding in Diane when Diane most needed it. Do you avoid asking for help? Is it a generational issue when it comes to using therapists? Are there times when you think asking for help from a family member might be helpful? Does it take courage?
11. Marita's research led her to realize that African Americans are two times as often diagnosed with Alzheimer's as compared to other groups—and they are also only around 3% of the groups that are involved in testing or family research. What has led to this big gap? Is Alzheimer's the silent disease in the Black community?
12. Marita also discovered that the leading researchers project that by the year 2050 African Americans will make up 40% of the total case load—that's a staggering number to come from one community. What kinds of measures should be taken? What part of the community is in a position to take a lead—churches, medical practices, fraternity and sorority groups or other community-based groups?
13. How do you think you would handle this kind of diagnosis—of someone you love or even to yourself? How have you faced similar challenges? Are there ways you think Diane could have chosen differently? Should Gregory and Diane have had a more comprehensive plan to handle his transition? How do caretakers get the care they need not only for the afflicted but also for themselves?
14. Beyond the tragedy, Marita points to the ways in which love can still survive amidst all of the feelings of loss. She describes when she was researching the book she visited with patients, their families, and their caretakers and was struck by how blessed you can feel when you slow down and become part of the moment. What have been your experiences? What else and who else have you read about who has had this perspective? What other sources of uplift and comfort have you turned to or would recommend?

### **Resources Marita recommends:**

*Creating Moments of Joy* by Joy Jolene Brackey – an inspirational read that will help reframe the experience so many caregivers and family members feel.

*Being My Mom's Mom* by Loretta Anne Woodward Veney—one daughter's memoir that shares it all—beautifully.

Walter Mosley tackles the subject in fiction from another perspective in his novel *The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey*—he has his hero face a choice of having his memory back and then in three months death, or let the disease take its toll and live longer. In this [Fresh Air](#) interview, he talks about how his mother's dementia and her death informed his novel.

[Alzheimer's Association](#), They have chapters all around the country, help for caregivers, advocacy and events. One June 17<sup>th</sup> they sponsor The Longest Day in honor of all those who are suffering from this disease.

[Alzheimer's Foundation](#), brings together more than 2300 local nonprofits working on this front.

And Maria Shriver has started the [Women's Alzheimer's Movement](#), with a June 4<sup>th</sup> Move for Minds event in eight cities in 2017! They also offer advice, support, and discuss prevention.

## **Interviews with Marita you might find useful to check out:**

[Maria Shriver Facebook Live interview](#)

[Black Enterprise](#)

[MyNDTalk with Dr. Pamela Brewster](#)

*The Wide Circumference of Love*  
By Marita Golden  
Arcade Publishing

Books available wherever books are sold or at these booksellers:

[Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), and [Indiebound](#)