



Embarrassing the Family

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Katherine Center is the author of five novels about love and family, all written for adults. They include *THE HAPPINESS PROJECT* and *THE LOST HUSBAND*. Her pieces have appeared in *Redbook*, *InStyle*, *People*, *USA Today*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Atlantic*, and *Real Simple*, as well as other periodicals and anthologies. Read more about Katherine here: <http://www.katherinecenter.com>.

Talk it Out

Read the following quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

For the apparel oft proclaims the man.

Now discuss:

This quote is often interpreted as "the clothes make the man." Do you agree with this statement?

Shakespeare, later in the same speech, goes on to say, "To thine own self be true." Do you agree with this statement? Do you think both statements can be true? Can you be true to yourself through clothing? How so?

Do you think Katherine was being true to herself when she went to the party? How or how not?

How important is what you wear to school? Do you think people treat you differently based on how you are dressed? Explain your answer using Katherine's story for evidence to support your opinion.

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Imagine that you are at a party and you do something embarrassing, like tripping and knocking over the table with the cake or spilling red punch on a friend's white rug. Write up the story of what happens. Include some friends who respond badly, and at least one friend who responds in just the perfect way.
- Write a poem that begins, "If I could, I would dress..."
- Imagine someone eavesdropping as two of his or her friends talk about him or her. Tell the story of what they say; how it makes him or her feel; and what he or she decides to do about it.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY

Katherine: The summer after sixth grade, you know, I was kind of a tomboy. My fashion skills were very low. And I remember my sister having a talk with my mom that summer and saying to my mom, "You have got to take Katherine to the mall and get her some better clothes. She's an embarrassment to the entire family."

Julie: Oh no.

Katherine: And my mom was like, "Oh my goodness, I didn't realize she was an embarrassment." I mean, my mom would never have been embarrassed by me; but she didn't realize that I was as bad as I was. Apparently I was bad. So my mom took me to the mall. And we went, and we got some Guess jeans that had zippers at the ankles, and we bought –

Julie: I remember those, I do.

Katherine: They were like the thing, right? They were the thing. At the end of the summer there was a back-to-school party for the beginning of seventh grade. And I put on all my new clothes, and I went to the party. And I just remember thinking that it was gonna be this amazing transformational moment, where all heads turn and there's this audible gasp where they look over and they're like, "Oh my God, she was beautiful all along." But of course none of that happened at all. I was just the same old dorky sixth grader that I had been the year before, but now I was a seventh grader.

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