

Ever heard of the game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon"? Get ready for.....

Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg



Malcolm Gladwell



Lois Weisberg

From the January 11, 1999 issue of The New Yorker. Writer **Malcolm Gladwell** is the author of several books, including *Outliers*, *Blink*, and *What the Dog Saw*, which explore social science research and psychology, sociology, and other disciplines. The profile, *Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg*, was later included in one of Gladwell's most famous books, *The Tipping Point*.

Step 1 Pre-Reading Activities

Deepen your experience by working through the questions and vocabulary below before reading the article.

Discuss with friends or think/write about the following questions:

- Do you have one friend who has connected you to other friends? Who is it? Have you maintained the connection?
- Do all your friends know each other, or do you belong to groups or circles of people who have little in common?

Step 1: Pre-Reading Activities Vocabulary

One of the great “side effects” of reading is growing your vocabulary. As you read “Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg,” make note of the words to the right and see if you can make out their meaning from the context of the article. Google them later to see if you were right.

oblique cursory
aficionado
commotion
itinerant
dazzling speculate
wry disparate potent
plausible turmoil
apt
reclusive

Pre-Reading Activities Idioms

Non-native speakers of English – and even original English speakers – can find certain older American and British idioms puzzling. Here are a few Gladwell used in this article. Come back to them after reading the article and see if the context helped you understand the meaning.

rat-a-tat

schlocky

hung out

walk of life

took a shine to

in the thick of things

flea market

lumped together

fluke

cart away

corner office

doodles

bundled up

eyesore

holding forth

down-to-earth

Important!

**STEP 2 – Read the
article – TWICE!!
(no, really!)**

IF POSSIBLE, print out a hard copy of the article. The first time, read simply for information, for pleasure. The second time, read slowly, noticing unfamiliar words, interesting uses of punctuation, or anything that gets your attention. On the hard copy, make note of interesting words or phrases, or anything you like.

HERE'S THE LINK:

[http://croker.harpethhall.org/Must%20Know/
Psychology/WeisbergGladwell.pdf](http://croker.harpethhall.org/Must%20Know/Psychology/WeisbergGladwell.pdf)

Post-reading Activities

Critical Thinking

One way to get a good piece of writing to stick with you is to spend some time thinking and writing about it.

Critical Thinking Exercise #1. Answer the questions to the right in complete sentences.

Critical Thinking Exercise #2. Write a short essay (under 200-500 words) summarizing your thoughts on the text to the right.

OR – DO BOTH!!

Exercise #1 Questions

1. How many “worlds” do you belong to?
2. What makes you “fit” into those worlds?
3. Is there a “Lois” at the center of each?
4. Do you know anyone like Lois? Are YOU a Lois?
5. What other famous experiments is Stanley Milgram associated with?

Exercise #2 Essay Prompt

Most, if not all, of Lois Weisberg’s friends and acquaintances are well-off, well-educated people of a particular social and economic strata. How big of a role do you think Lois Weisberg’s law degree and financial resources played in the size of her influence and her ability to enter so many different “worlds”? Were her money and education the fuel for her social power, or was her influence due to her innate qualities? What would a Lois Weisberg with less money and education be like? How might she influence and connect others?

Post-reading Activities: Vocabulary Building

In their book, “Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning,” (A GREAT book, by the way!) authors Peter Brown, Henry Roediger III, and Mark McDaniel explore recent advances in cognitive psychology research that challenges our traditional ideas about the best way to learn.

One of the biggest takeaways is that the process of recalling recently studied material (like vocabulary) makes you more likely to retain the information: e.g., taking a short vocabulary quiz a week or two after you studied the material, instead of cramming for a test at the last minute.

Quizlet, a free learning app, is a great tool for reviewing, recalling, and *retaining* information, using games, flashcards, and other tools. There’s even a mobile app for your phone.

A Quizlet has been prepared using selected vocabulary from the article. Let me know if there are words you’d like added to it.

○ Find it here: [Six Degrees of Lois Quizlet](#)

Read2Write Exercise Submissions

For those of you who completed the written exercises associated with this Read2Write – excellent!! If you'd like to send them to the Writing & Career Services office for feedback, attach your document (preferably in Word) to an email and send it to sphworkwrite@llu.edu.

You'll get feedback in the form of comments, suggestions or high-fives as soon as possible after we receive it. If you'd like to make an appointment to discuss your work or learn how to improve your writing in general, fill out an appointment request [here](#).

We hope you enjoyed reading (and maybe writing) about Lois Weisberg. Keep going to read more about her.

Farewell to Lois

Sadly, Lois Weisberg died in 2016. Here are three obituaries written about her, one from her hometown newspaper, the Chicago Tribune, as well as the New York Times and The New Yorker, referencing Malcolm Gladwell's article.

The obituaries make clear the effect she had on the city of Chicago.

- [Lois Weisberg, Chicago's Cultural Connector, Dies at 90](#)
- [Lois Weisberg, Chicago Arts Chief, Dead at 90](#)
- [Lois Weisberg, 1925-2016](#)



Got a question about writing?
Send an email to sphworkwrite@llu.edu, or
request an [appointment](#).