

***Reading Guide***  
**The Rose Variations**  
**By Marisha Chamberlain**

1. Why has Chamberlain chosen *The Rose Variations* as her title? Is the character of Rose MacGregor especially variable? Or could her various approaches to life problems be a sign of resilience? Does Rose learn from her experience, or is she caught repeating mistakes in endless variation?
2. The theme of luck comes up repeatedly in this novel, particularly luck in love. Frances Dupre describes Rose as lucky. Is she? What about Frances—is she as unlucky as she claims to be? How does the theme of luck play out in the novel?
3. Music as a pursuit and musical form exert force in this novel. How is the novel constructed like a piece of music? Why would that be, and how does it work for the reader? What is it about theme and variation that attracts composers?
4. Rose and Frances are friends “in spite of themselves.” Why? Are Rose’s other friendships equally unlikely? What does the novel have to say about friendship?
5. Rivalry between women comes up repeatedly. Frances compares herself to Rose; Rose compares herself to Ursula Kaiser, her best friend from grad school. Rose’s mischievous sister, Natalie, arrives and stirs up sibling rivalry. Does rivalry just seem the natural state of women in this novel?
6. Rose talks about the “glueyness of marriage.” What does she mean by that? How are the various marriages in the novel portrayed? Would Rose ever be likely to marry?
7. Frances refuses to acknowledge that Alan Gilpin is gay until events force her to do so. What does Rose similarly refuse to acknowledge but inevitably have to confront?
8. Midway through the novel Rose makes an ill-advised choice to offer herself sexually out of pity to someone who clearly desires her. What makes Rose try this? Does anything good come out of this attempt at connection?
9. In another mishap, Rose is faced with unwanted sexual advances from a conductor who has power over her career. Why does she succumb? What consequence is she trying to avoid, and what consequence ensues?
10. The story includes many less-than-happy events. Is this a sad novel? Why is Rose not mired in depression, given how many things go wrong? What role does her fortitude play in the unfolding of the plot?
11. “Life is a rental,” observes the piano tuner, Graham Lowe, thereby highlighting one of the novel’s themes—impermanence versus permanence. In what characters is this theme most directly evident?

12. In what way is the novel's ending a victory for Rose, and in what way is it a defeat?  
Could this be a happy ending, given the unexpected final events?