

The Dutch House

1. Why was the story narrated from Danny's perspective rather than Maeve's? How might the story have been different if told from Maeve's point of view?
2. There are many descriptions of the Dutch House throughout the novel. In her interview with The Philadelphia Inquirer, Ann Patchett says that while many people have told her the descriptions of the house are very vivid, she truly believes she left a lot of the house up to the individual reader's imagination. What was your image of the Dutch House? Does it differ from other members of your book club?
3. How would you describe the relationship between Danny and Maeve? Why do you think they remain so close throughout the novel?
4. What sort of influence did Danny and Maeve's father, Cyril Conroy, have over them? How would you characterize Cyril?
5. How do Danny and Maeve feel about their mother Elna? What sort of effect does her leaving have on them? What about her return? How are Danny and Maeve affected differently by Elna's departure and return? And why?
6. Many of reviews of The Dutch House have compared the story to a fairytale: abandoned children, a creepy old house, and evil stepmother...is this a fair comparison? If The Dutch House does have fairytale elements, what purpose does that serve in the story?
7. In the aforementioned quotation from Ann Patchett, the author reflects on her obsession with wealth, poverty, and class issues. Those issues are obviously at play in this novel, but to what end? What do you think Patchett is trying to say about wealth, poverty, and class in America?
8. After their stepmother kicks them out of the Dutch House, both Danny and Maeve remain obsessed with their childhood home. For instance, throughout the years, they often sit in a car outside of the house and just look at it. What explains their obsessions with this house? And how do their feelings about the house and about the meaning of "home" change with the passing years?
9. How did you feel about the jumps in time in the novel? Did the places where the narration moved forward in time make sense? Did it seem necessary for this novel to span such a large expanse of time in these characters' lives? If the story focused on a smaller period of time, would it change the way we viewed the themes of this novel?
10. Did the book end the way you thought it might end when Danny's daughter May buys the Dutch House? Does the Dutch House take on new meaning for Danny under this new ownership? Did it take on new meaning for you as the reader?