

## Discussion Questions for *Notes on an Execution*

by *Danya Kukafka*

1. The author originally wrote the Ansel portions in the third person but decided it was too “flat.” Does the second person rewrite work? (**Judy Catterton, Vicky Kelly**)
2. How do you feel about the pacing in the narrative? (**Judy Catterton**) On the one hand, there are a lot of elements of a thriller in this book—and it’s even classified that way; but it doesn’t consistently move at the pace (or with the tension) we’d expect of a thriller. The novel is also very much a character study, not only of Ansel but of the three women whose POV’s we are in. (Look at how much of Saffy’s private life, we get, for instance). Did the dual nature—maybe dual purpose—of the book hurt it (not paced quickly enough for the thriller elements)?
3. Related to that, did the structure of the countdown work? One of the reasons we choose this book was because of this unique structure. Did it make the book better? Worse? How so? (**Maribeth Fischer**)
4. This book has four points of view. In addition to Ansel, we have Lavender’s, Saffy’s, and Hazel’s POV. Did you feel we needed all three? I’m also curious why we didn’t get Jenny’s POV, but her sister Hazel’s... (**Maribeth Fischer**)
5. The author said in an interview that the notion that the death penalty serves the ends of justice is “preposterous.” She intended this view to come across in this book. Does it? (**Judy Catterton**). Also, in the book notes the author references “interrogating our system of justice and our cultural obsession with crime stories” asking readers to consider “the false promise of looking for meaning in the psyche of a violent man.” Did she succeed in that interrogation? (**Vicky Kelly**)
6. Perhaps related to the above, Was Ansel what you expected of a serial killer? (**Vicky Kelly**) Do you sympathize with Ansel in places, feel, maybe, that he never had a chance? Is this part of what the author wants us to feel in our “interrogation of the criminal justice system?” (**Maribeth Fischer**)
7. The last chapter is titled “Elsewhere” and begins, “In another World, they are sleeping,” then goes on to give us a glimpse into the lives that each of the murdered woman might have led. Does this add anything? (**Judy Catterton**). I can’t help but notice that we end that section with Jenny welcoming new babies into the world and whispering, “Welcome little one. You’ll see. It’s good here,” which I think is a stunning move—for it brings us right back to the beginning and the baby about to be born to Lavender...(**Maribeth**)
8. A number of us have been commenting on the beautiful writing in this novel. Might we each share a sentence, a description, a phrase that we think worthy of notice—the type of writing we might aspire to in our own work? (**Ceil Payne**)