

Discussion Questions for *Small Things Like These*

1. Starting and finishing. Claire Keegan seems to start in the latest possible place and end in the earliest possible place, and I, who overwrite everything, would love to do that more. So how do we learn from this? How does all that's left out shape this (perhaps think about what is left out of the story), and how does she still make us understand and feel everything that's at stake without all that detail we usually need? (I'm even overwriting my question!)—*Ethan Joella*
2. Along with Ethan's question, Keegan did an amazing job of letting you know how to feel about people with just a few details. The scene when Furlong first finds Sarah, up until he leaves the convent, tells us everything we need to know about what is going on, yet nothing is spelled out. What details did you note that conveyed character without Keegan TELLING us how to feel about character. For instance, on pg. 68, the Mother Superior's eyes are described as "neither blue nor grey but somewhere in between" and just that little detail—not being able to pin down something so basic as eye color felt like it was really about how you couldn't pin down Mother Superior. She seems one thing but is not. Focusing just on that scene (page 62-76), what details did you notice (actions, gestures, things said—or not said, pauses, descriptions) that revealed character (Ha! Talk about overwriting questions!)—*Maribeth Fischer*
3. There are a number of scenes that don't seem to add directly to the PLOT of the book: On page 19, Loretta is afraid of Santa; on page 53, Kathleen is out of sorts about having to go to the dentist; on page 57 Furlong needs to borrow a kettle of hot water from a strange woman to unfreeze the lock at work and then a page later, standing at work, looking over everything, he lets the phone ring and doesn't answer it pg. 59: In a book this spare, you assume everything is necessary, so what is the purpose of these scenes?—*Maribeth Fischer*
4. Furlong provides for his family what he lacked as a child. Still, they are not rich. Why do you think Claire Keegan choose this man for her protagonist? (Publishers question). Along these lines, do you think Furlong's feelings toward the girls at the convent would be as strong if he wasn't illegitimate? If he was a "legitimate" guy, would he have any feelings for them at all given the power of the church at the time?—*Paul Dyer*

5. When Furlong was worrying over the young woman in the convent and Mrs. Kehoe talked to him about it (or around it) pgs. 97-100, it felt as if they were talking in code, discussing something without ever spelling it out. This is probably a cultural thing in Ireland, but difficult to do in writing, and it created a sense of danger in this small community. I don't know if that's a question yet, but it's something worth studying. —**Sarah Barnett**. *Perhaps the question has to do with noting how this increases the tension—not saying things directly?* —**Maribeth Fischer**
6. Why do you think the author chose to set the story in the weeks leading up to Christmas? What would have changed if it were set at another time?—**Goodreads question**