

EGGSHELLS

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Reading Group Guide

- 1.** Vivian makes a lot of lists and plays with word associations and sounds. She also searches through her notebook of lists in contemplating her own feelings and significance. What insight do we gain into Vivian from the ways she plays with language? What do we learn about her character specifically and only through this device?
- 2.** The drawings in the book show not only how visually perceptive Vivian is, but also how abstract she can be. How literally can we interpret these images to be her mental maps and shapes?
- 3.** Many moments in the book feel as though they honor Irish traditions and lore, such as the plaque that Vivian reads: “Near here is the reputed site of the well where St. Patrick baptized many local inhabitants in the 5th century AD.” Do you feel these scenes connect to a broader symbolism? What references or allusions stand out?
- 4.** The way Vivian mentions certain landmarks recalls James Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Scholars of Joyce have noted that his observations of Dublin differ in his stories depending on whether the travel is either passive (e.g. by bus) or active (e.g. on foot). Is the same true for *Eggshells*? Are Vivian’s experiences and observations different or more important depending whether she is passive or active?
- 5.** In Greek myth, Penelope is the wife of Odysseus, and she is known for her faithfulness to him while he fights in the Trojan War and completes his long Odyssey home. Do you think the issue of

faithfulness is what prompts Vivian to advertise for a friend named Penelope specifically? Do you think she feels she needs a Penelope of her own because she is on an Odyssey of her own? If not, what are other reasons why she might have preferred this particular name?

6. Is it possible, in the world of this book, that Vivian really is a fairy? Or that there is a portal to another world? Do you think she really believes this? If so, what does that belief say about her?