

EGGSHELLS

Caitriona Lally

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 to look for her own feelings and significance. What insight do we gain into Vivian by the way 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 the reader interpret these images to be her mental maps and shapes?
3. Many moments in the book feel like they honor Irish traditions and lore, like 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 like these scenes connect to broader symbolism? What references or allusions stand out?
4. The way Vivian mentions certain landmarks recalls for some Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Scholars have noted in Joyce that observations of Dublin differ in his stories when the travel is either passive (e.g. bus) or active (e.g. walking). Do you think Vivian’s experiences and observations are different or important 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 is on his Odyssey. Do you think the issue of faithfulness is what prompted Vivian to advertise for a friend named Penelope? If not, why might she have preferred this 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?