

Looking Deeper:
***A Reader's Guide for book clubs and other literary adventurers who love
to uncover hidden layers of meaning . . .***

1. The opening line of *Angel Park* signals the beginning of a fairy tale motif that emerges in many other places throughout the story. Trace the major fairy tale references and see if you can discern the author's point in utilizing this fairy tale concept. How do these references enrich the meaning of the story?
2. The story is told by a rather opinionated narrator. What kind of person is this, and what is his/her function in the story? Is it a male or female voice, or does it matter? The reader is almost eavesdropping as the narrator tells the tale: When and under what circumstances do you think the story is being told...and who is listening?
3. Newspapers, the weather, politicians, lawyers, and "the system" are among the objects of the author's irony. Even the concept of racism is given both serious and ironic treatment throughout the story. How are these issues and types particularly American, as the opening of the story tells us, and how are they universal?
4. We enter the minds of four main characters as they play out their stories: Connie Demetrios, the protagonist; Joe Clay, Maureen McCarthy, and John Delaney. Why has the author chosen these four voices to speak to the reader, and what does each contribute to the meaning of the story?
5. We also hear the thoughts of one minor character, Andy, the custodian. What is his role in the story, and what purpose is served by ending the story with his thoughts and actions?
6. The story is set in the mid-1990s, although the author first published it in 2006. What reasons do you think she had for creating such a time-specific setting? What

- clues do we find in that time and place to help us understand a broader purpose for the story? How would you articulate that broader purpose?
7. While the story appears to be about the state of public education in America, a lot of time and energy is spent on the development of the main character, Connie Demetrios. What role does nature play in her life, and why is this aspect of her character important to the broader purpose of the story? How do images from nature reveal ironies in Connie's school setting? Why do you think nature is used as a central metaphor in this story?
 8. The statue of the angel looming over Angel Park is a pivotal symbol in the story. Why has the author chosen an angel to build the story around? How do the existence of the angel and the name of Angel Park contribute to the irony of the story? Why is the angel statue a key part of the ending of the story?
 9. Why is the suicide of Maureen McCarthy the opening scene of the novel? How do Maureen's personal life and her ambitions contribute to her demise? How much of a part do you think the school system played in her decision to end her life? Most importantly, what does Connie learn from Maureen?
 10. The epilogue, like a coda to a piece of music, contributes a closing frame to the story. Do you consider this an uplifting or a bleak ending? Which makes more sense in the context of the whole story? If you find the ending ambiguous, what could have been the author's intention in making it so?