



[The Dutch House](#) by Ann Patchett
Book Discussion Questions
Wednesday, December 16, 2020 @ 6:30 pm

Discussion Questions

1. What are the many and varied details of the Dutch House—rooms, stairways, architectural specifics, furniture, windows and doors, etc.? What mood or personality does each space or element possess?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between Maeve and Danny?
3. What is Cyril Conroy like? How might specific behaviors, routines, and decisions of his have influenced Maeve and Danny?
4. What are Fluffy's various, evolving roles in the Dutch House? What is her overall influence on Maeve and Danny?
5. What explains why Elna Conroy abandoned her children? In what ways might such a profound decision be justified or not?
6. What were the various effects of Elna Conroy leaving her husband and children? Was it preferable, as Maeve argues, to have spent some years with her and then lost her or, as Danny experienced, to never have known her?
7. What might be the significance of Maeve receiving a box of matches and instruction for how to light a fire from her mother on her eighth birthday?
8. When discussing Maeve's diabetes, Danny suggests that, "the body had all sorts of means to deal with what it couldn't understand." What does this mean? What is the relationship between physical health and emotional stress or trauma?
9. In what ways are Sandy and Jocelyn important to the various Conroys?
10. What are Maeve's particular strengths and abilities? What are her priorities in life?
11. What forces—familial, social, cultural—might explain why the two males, Cyril and Danny, are in various ways "excused...from all responsibility" about the lives and struggles of the girls and women in the house?
12. What is the source of Andrea's power? Why is she so bent on using it against the others—especially the women—in the house? What does she covet and care about?
13. What is significant about each of the portraits in the Dutch House?
14. Why do Maeve and Danny sit secretly in a car outside of the Dutch House many times throughout the years after they are exiled from it?
15. What were the "original disappointments" that Celeste felt about Danny? Why did her relationship with Maeve begin so well and become so acrimonious?

16. Despite completing medical school, why is Danny drawn so powerfully to the construction, buying, and selling of buildings? What does he mean when he says he is "at home on a building site"?
17. What does it mean the Maeve and Danny "had made a fetish out of [their] misfortune, fallen in love with it"? What explains such powerful attachment to painful experiences and relationships?
18. Danny eventually realizes that "after years of living in response to the past, [he and Maeve] had somehow become miraculously unstuck." What does this mean?
19. Later in life, sitting outside the Dutch House, Danny realizes that "the feeling of home" he was experiencing was due not to the house but "wholly and gratefully" to his sister Maeve. What defines and determines a feeling of home?
20. What explains the very different responses Maeve and Danny have to their mother's return?

Major Characters

Danny Conroy: narrator and younger child of Elna and Cyril

Maeve Conroy: Danny's older sister

Cyril Conroy: Maeve and Danny's father, referred to primarily as dad or Mr. Conroy

Elna Conroy: Maeve and Danny's mother; Cyril Conroy's first wife

Andrea Smith: Cyril's second wife, a young widow and wicked step-mother to Maeve and Danny

Norma Smith: Andrea's older daughter

Bright Smith: Andrea's younger daughter

Sandy: housekeeper at the Dutch House, sister to Jocelyn

Jocelyn: cook at the Dutch House, sister to Sandy

Fluffy (Fiona) DiCamillo: nanny to Danny and Maeve and later to May and Kevin

Mr Otterson: owner of Otterson's Frozen Vegetables where Maeve works

Mrs Buchsbaum: neighbor who lives near the Dutch House

Lawyer Gooch: Conroy family lawyer and friend

Celeste Norcross: Danny's wife

May and Kevin: Celeste and Danny's children

Dr. Morey Able: Danny's organic chemistry professor, mentor and friend