

The Last Days of Rabbit Hayes – Reading Group Questions

- Anna McPartlin says she finds humour and humanity in even the darkest situations – do you agree that human kindness and joy will always shine through even the bleakest moments?
- Rabbit is well cared for, and her family and the hospice strive to give her a ‘good death’, but even so she endures pain and indignity. What do you think this novel tells us about the treatment of the dying? Does everybody have the right to a ‘good death’?
- Johnny does not want Rabbit to see him in his lowest moments, and she wasn’t there when he passed away. Was Rabbit ever able to let him go?
- How did you think the structure of the novel affected your reading of it? Did you know that Johnny was going to die, or did this come as a shock?
- For a long time, Juliet refuses to acknowledge that her mother is dying, and denial is something many of the characters experience. How do they each come to accept Rabbit’s death?
- Molly puts her foot in it many times, but always makes Rabbit laugh. Is laughter the best medicine?
- Juliet is with her mother until the end, and helps care for her when she is sick. What effect do you think being with a parent at such a harrowing time can have? Was it better for Juliet to be with Rabbit at the end?
- Knowing she is going to die changes Rabbit’s outlook on life. What do you think she learns?
- All the characters have different attitudes towards religion and the Catholic Church. Many people turn to religion in their darkest moments, but not Rabbit. Why do you think this is?
- How does Anna McPartlin represent the different time periods in this novel? Did you get a real sense of past and present?
- Ma is a powerful figure in the novel. What other representations of motherhood are there?
- Who do you think is the strongest character in this novel? Fierce, outspoken Molly, who has fought for her children all her life or quiet, kind Jack, who refuses to give up on the daughter he helped deliver?
- Do you think the family made the right decision in letting Davey look after Juliet?