

The Secret Place Discussion Questions

by Tana French

Author Bio: (Reading Group Guides, Tana French website, & Fantastic Fiction)

Born in Vermont, Tana French grew up in Ireland, Italy, the United States, and Malawi. She has lived in Dublin since 1990 with her family. She trained as a professional actress and has worked in theater and film.



Her debut novel, “In The Woods”, was honored with the Edgar, Barry, Macavity and Anthony awards. “Secret Place” was nominated in the Anthony Awards Best Novel (2015) category.

Characters:

- **Detective Stephen Moran** – Police officer working in Cold Case division.
- **Antoinette Conway** – Detective in the Murder squad. Lead on the Harper case.
- **Frank Mackey** – Holly’s father. A police officer friend of Detective Moran.
- **St. Kilda’s** – Elite boarding school for girls in Dublin.
- **Holly Mackey** – 16 year old girl. Goes to St. Kilda’s boarding school. Finds a secret note she takes to Detective Moran. Father is a police officer. She was a witness in another trial when she was younger.
- **Julia Harte** – Holly’s boarding school friend/roommate. Boss of group. Tends to be a smart alec.
- **Becca O’Mara** – Holly’s boarding school friend/roommate. Naïve.
- **Selina Wynne** – Holly’s boarding school friend/roommate. Very pretty. Dating Harper before his murder. She says she can see his ghost.
- **Miss McKenna** – Headmistress at St. Kilda’s.
- **Joanne Heffernan** – Student at St. Kilda’s. A popular “mean girl.” In charge of the “the Daleks.”
- **Gemma** – Part of “The Daleks” group. Pretty and smart.
- **Alison** – Part of “The Daleks” group. Timid. Afraid of everything.
- **Orla** – Bottom of “The Daleks” group. Not very smart or put together.
- **Colm’s** – Elite boarding school for boys in Dublin.
- **Christopher Harper** – 16 years old. 4th year student at Colm, a boarding school for boys. Murdered 1 year earlier on St. Kilda’s property. Hit with a hoe.
- **Finn Carrol** – Chris Harper’s boarding school friend/roommate. Electronics genius.
- **James Gillen** – Colm boy who kisses Julia at The Field. She rebuffs him.
- **Marcus Wiley** – Colm’s boy. Sent the “picture” to Julia.
- **The Court** – The mall near the Boarding schools. Where the boarding school students go to hang out.
- **The Field** – Empty lot next to The Court where the students go to hang out and do “unapproved” activities.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. There was a lot of Irish slang throughout the book. Did you find it helpful or harmful to the storyline?
3. The book was written from multiple characters' points of view, as well as moving back and forth between the past and the present. Was it successfully done? Did it help or harm the story?
4. Did you find the characters in this story believable?
5. What part of the author's portrayal of adolescence rang the truest with your own experience? Of all the teenagers in the novel, which reminded you most of yourself at the age?
6. You are told at the beginning of the book that Chris is going to die. Does the knowledge of impending his death make his joie de vivre (joy in life) sweeter or does it make it darker?
7. Becca dots/tattoos her body with perfect moments. Why is that important to her?
8. When the girls decide not to date/not care about what others think, what do they put into motion? Was it a good idea?
9. Detective Mackey warns Conway that Moran is ambitious, even to the point of disloyalty. Is this true?
10. Similarly, Mackey explains to Moran why Conway is so disliked by the Murder Squad. Do you believe his reasoning or is he trying to play on Moran's fears? If you were Conway, how would you have reacted to the other detectives' behavior?
11. How do you feel about the supernatural aspects of the book?
12. Do you think any of the students actually saw Chris's ghost?
13. The book's title, The Secret Place, refers to the St. Kilda's board where the girls post their secrets, but in what other ways could it be interpreted?
14. Moran admits, "I love beautiful; always have. I never saw why I should hate what I wish I had" (p. 31). What does he mean? Does this affect his work on the case?
15. There are many differing perspectives on Chris's feelings and actions. What do Selena, Julia, Holly, and Becca each believe? Who do you agree with?
16. At what point in the book did you begin to piece together what happened?
17. Would Chris Harper's murder case have been handled differently if it had occurred in a poor neighborhood?
18. French writes that "when Holly thinks about it a long time afterwards, when things are starting to stay fixed and come into focus at last, she will think that probably there are ways you could say Marcus Wiley killed Chris Harper" (p. 95). What does she mean?
19. Do you think the killer is a sociopath or something else?
20. In the end, do you think the person who put up the note regrets/will regret it?
21. Tana French has written 6 books in the Dublin Murder Squad series. Will you read them?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/f/tana-french/>
- LitLovers – <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/9970-secret-place-french?start=3>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=174972fa-c644-424a-9c85-ad6e4c6ee11f%40sessionmgr102&hid=107&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10321586&db=neh>
- Reading Group Guides - <http://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-secret-place/guide>
- Tana French - <http://www.tanafrench.com/about.html>

Tana French's Books

Dublin Murder Squad Series

1. In the Woods (2006)
2. The Likeness (2008)
3. Faithful Place (2010)
4. Broken Harbour (2012)
5. The Secret Place (2014)
6. The Trespasser (2016)

If you liked The Secret Place, try...

- Little Black Lies – SJ Bolton
- Coffin Road – Peter May
- Swing Time – Zadie Smith
- Skippy Dies – Paul Murray
- The Language Of Secrets – Ausma Khan