



The Enchanted

By Rene Denfeld
ISBN: 9780062285508

The Enchanted RGG

Questions for Discussion

1. The novel opens with the line, "This is an enchanted place. Others don't see it but I do." The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word "enchant" as, "to attract and hold the attention of (someone) by being interesting, pretty, etc.; to put a magic spell on (someone or something)." Why does the narrator call this place enchanted? What beauty does he find in his surroundings that others do not? What does this tell us about the narrator?

2. Talk about the main characters: the narrator, the lady, the priest, and York, the prisoner on death row at the center of the story. How are these characters' lives and their fates intrinsically connected?

What do we learn about the lady and the priest from the narrator?

3. Why does York want to die and why does the lady want to save him? Is he worth saving? How does she go about gathering evidence to understand his case, knowledge that might prevent his execution? What propels her choice at the novel's end?

4. Think about York. What were your first impressions about him when he's introduced? As you discovered more about his story, did your outlook towards him change? How does the experience of investigating York's past affect the lady and her outlook towards York? How does it shape how she sees her own life?

5. What draws the lady and the priest to one another? Why do you think each chose the career they pursued? How do their callings sustain them emotionally? Are they good at what they do—even if the priest is himself fallen from grace?

6. What has being locked inside done to the narrator—and for him? What about some of the other prisoners he watches? Do you believe in rehabilitation? Do you think our prison system today encourages rehabilitation? Is there something else we can do besides imprison those who commit crimes?

7. One of the Ten Commandments is "thou shalt not kill." Isn't executing someone—even someone who committed a heinous crime such as taking another's life—going against morality? Why is the death penalty still used in the United States compared to most other modern democracies?

8. Do you believe that we are products of our circumstances? How much can free will mitigate terrible damage that inflicted in a person's youth, when he or she is most vulnerable and impressionable? Why do people do such terrible things to each other and to innocent children? "There is too much pain in the world, that's the problem," the lady tells the priest. What causes so much of the world's pain and can we, both individually and as a society, do to help alleviate this suffering? How much responsibility do we carry for our fellow men and women?

9. What do you think is the worst punishment that the prisoners in the novel face being locked away? "It is meaning that drives most people forward into time and it is meaning that reminds them of the past, so they know where they are in the universe. But what about men like me? For us time doesn't exist." Think about time in your life and in the narrator's. How do you respond to him? What can give a life that is not measured by the events of time real meaning? How is such a life measured? Think about not being able to touch someone or see the sky. How would that affect you for a day? A week? A year? A lifetime?

10. What happens to people when they are incarcerated? How can we make the prison system more humane? Should it be humane or do convicts, regardless of the level of their crimes, "deserve what they get"? As a society, do we see prison more as punishment or as retribution? How can we save people from having failed lives? Is it possible to save someone?

11. Do you think that death offers release for men like York and the narrator? Did they find peace?

12. Like the lady, Rene Denfeld is a fact investigator in death penalty cases. How do you think her work shaped the story? Did reading *The Enchanted* alter your view of prison?

13. Rene Denfeld touches on many issues and themes: Mental illness, justice, time, kindness, remorse, forgiveness, the need for love and connection, life and death itself. Choose one or two and trace them through the novel, using examples from the novel to enrich your analysis.

14. Why did you choose to read this novel? Did the novel surprise you in any way? Explain why or why not. What did you take away from reading *The Enchanted*?