



1. Kyle and his father differ greatly as people, with Kyle being the less practical one. However, throughout the book, he often thinks, “This is what Dad would do.” In what ways is his father his personal touchstone for responsibility and how does that inform his own actions? In what ways do we see him move toward a serious understanding of adulthood and adult choices?
2. For the character of “bird girl,” the author has chosen broken free verse for her passages. How do the assembling and/or disassembling of words represent her evolving state of mind? How does the author clue the reader in on the girl’s actual memories versus what is happening to her and her observations in the present?
3. How does Kyle’s experience with 9/11 inform his understanding of the Ugandan Bush War, an event that led to the murder of his friend Marcus’s family? And, in what ways did his Ugandan Bush War research put 9/11 into a different perspective for him?
4. During the book, Kyle, his uncle Matt, and “bird girl” form a temporary family unit. How do you think the week might have been different for Kyle and his uncle if she had not joined them?
5. The author places emphasis on small tasks throughout the book such as doing laundry or cooking dinner. Why do you think this is?
6. Kyle and “bird girl” develop feelings for one another in a vacuum. Do you think if she had lived closer they might have made it work? Or, do you think the circumstances dictated powerful, short-term connections? Why do you think it is important to find personal connections in the midst of tragedy?
7. As an event, 9/11 brought people together, but in many ways it was also divisive. In what ways does the author showcase this? Have you seen this sense of divisiveness with similar world events? Discuss.

Discussion Questions



8. The word “Things” in the book’s title, *The Memory of Things*, is generic and broad. Why do you think the author chose that word? What different roles does memory play in the story? How do Kyle, the bird girl, and Uncle Matt differ on what memory means to them? How do they overlap?
9. Throughout the story, the author discusses Zen koans, “riddles that don’t have any right answers,” particularly focusing on the Zen koan “What was your original face before your mother and father were born?” Why is this riddle important to Kyle? In what ways does he seek to know his original face? In what way does his broader understanding of this riddle change the way he views himself and his place in his family?
10. Though “bird girl,” now known as Hannah, has her memory back by the end of the book, the author allows her to drift back into broken verse one last time. What do you think this says about how Hannah feels in this moment?
11. In telling the story, the author carefully researched life in the U.S. in 2001. At that time, Wikipedia was a brand new Web site, iPhones had not been invented yet, not all kids had cell phones, and people were resistant to some of the newer technology. Ground Zero only then became a part of our lexicon. The now ever-present news scroll at the bottom of our TVs only came about as a result of 9/11. How else has life changed since 9/11? What additional words came into our lexicon or behaviors have become a part of our daily routines?
12. The author references Salinger’s *Nine Stories* and particularly, *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* and *For Esme—with Love and Squalor*. What parallels, if any, is she trying to draw between those stories and Kyle’s story? What are your thoughts on referencing classic literature in modern stories for children and young adults?