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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **In the woods** by Tana French

#### Summary

As dusk approaches a small Dublin suburb in the summer of 1984, mothers begin to call their children home.

But on this warm evening, three children do not return from the dark and silent woods. When the police arrive, they find only one of the children gripping a tree trunk in terror, wearing blood-filled sneakers, and unable to recall a single detail of the previous hours.

Twenty years later, the found boy, Rob Ryan, is a detective on the Dublin Murder Squad and keeps his past a secret.

But when a twelve-year-old girl is found murdered in the same woods, he and Detective Cassie Maddox—his partner and closest friend—find themselves investigating a case chillingly similar to the previous unsolved mystery. Now, with only snippets of long-buried memories to guide him, Ryan has the chance to uncover both the mystery of the case before him and that of his own shadowy past.

#### Discussion Questions

1. What do the woods represent symbolically in Tana French's novel? Does their significance change as the story progresses?
2. The loss or absence of stable families is a recurring motif in *In the Woods*. How do French's characters, particularly Ryan, attempt to compensate for this absence?
3. Does the Irish setting of *In the Woods* contribute significantly to the telling of the story, or do you find French's novel to be about humanity on a more universal level?
4. How does Ryan's experience *In the Woods* at the age of twelve affect his ability to function as a detective? Is it always a hindrance to him, or are there ways in which it improves and deepens his insights?

5. Cassie Maddox, Ryan's partner, is perhaps the most consistently appealing character in the novel. What are her most attractive qualities? What are the weaker points of her personality? Does Ryan ever fully appreciate her?
6. After sleeping together, Ryan and Cassie cease to be friends. Why do you think the experience of physical intimacy is so damaging to their relationship? Are there other reasons why their friendship falls apart?
7. Ryan states that he both craves truth and tells lies. How reliable do you find him as a narrator? In what ways does the theme of truth and misrepresentation lie at the heart of *In the Woods*?
8. Imagine that you are Ryan's therapist. With what aspects of his personality would you most want to help him come to terms? Do you think there would be any way to lead him out of the woods?
9. How convincing is French's explanation of the motivating forces that lead to Katy's murder—forces that come close to a definition of pure evil? Are such events and motivations ever truly explicable?
10. The plan to build the new motorway, trampling as it does on a past that some regard as sacred, is an outrage to the archaeologists who are trying to preserve an ancient legacy. How does this conflict fit thematically with Ryan's own contradictory desires to unearth and to pave over his past?
11. Do you have your own theories about the mysteries that remain unsolved at the end of *In the Woods*? What are they?
12. What were your thoughts and emotions upon finishing *In the Woods*? If this book affected you differently from other mysteries you have read, why do you think this was true?

Summary and Discussion Questions from the publisher.