

# The Much Dreaded Discussion Questions

## “Memento Mori” by Jonathan Nolan

### Psychological Thriller Genre

#### Focal Point: Writing Style & Significance

Question 1: “*Memento Mori*” is broken into sections. The italicized sections represents the notes that the narrator has left for himself. These are in first person. However, the other sections inform the reader about Earl in third person. How does this style influence the reader’s interpretation of the text? (If you have read The Girl on the Train or The Color of Water, how does this going back and forth affect one’s analysis and comprehension of the text?)

#### Focal Point: Character Differences: One in the Same?

Question 2: In the text, Earl reads several notes that at times possess different tones of voice (suggesting the potentiality that they have different authors). In one note, Earl explains that “people [are] never just any one person with one set of attributes... for a few minutes of everyday, every man becomes a genius.” Are these long notes really being left by “genius” Earl? How is this genius Earl who writes each mento different from the “regular” Earl that reads the notes?

#### Focal Point: The Implementation of Foreshadowing

Question 3: The narrator alternately seems to focus on the dichotomy between the personal state of mind and the practical existence of Earl. Does the author do an effective job of foreshadowing through this technique? What does alternation, between perspectives, add to this story in regards to holistically processing what is going on?

#### Focal Point: It’s All in the Title

Question 4: Consider the title: Memento Mori. Using your iPad, look up the conceptual background behind the title. How does the title complete the text? How is the conclusion enhanced by the title and philosophical standpoint of “memento mori?”

#### Focal Point: The Mirror & The Watch

Question 5: Always be on the look out for symbols. What is the mirror symbolic of in this text (consider point-of-view)? What is the watch symbolic of in this text? How does the continuous reference to these throughout fit in with the theme of the story?

#### Focal Point: The Power of Interpretation

Question 6: What is the big mystery in the story? How do the tattoos, the last scene (taxi or police car), and the death scene blur the reality of the situation? Who actually killed the wife? Or do you think she was killed?

#### Focal Point: Beyond the Plot Diagram

Question 7: As we discussed in class, the plot diagram does not always unfold in the conventional way. If you had to plot the events in chronological order, based on your interpretation of what is happening, how would that look different from the plot diagram of the story as it unfolds?

#### Focal Point: Direct & Indirect Characterizations

Question 8: Find three examples of direct characterization. Find three examples of indirect characterization. Discuss them.

#### Focal Point: What like a bullet can deceive...

Question 9: The story starts with the quote: “What like a bullet can deceive” What is the significance of this quotation to start off the story? Does this refer to Earl’s task that “must be done,” or does it illustrate how he struggles to make sense of what has happened to him? In what ways could “bullet” be a symbol for time in this text? Does Earl’s ten minutes of clarity represent ten minutes of his life free of deception? Use clear examples from the text as evidence to support your answer.