



Riddance; or, The Sybil Joines School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children

by Shelley Jackson
Discussion Questions

1. *Riddance* is posed as a series of found texts, and the editor adds commentary throughout. How did this framing affect your experience as a reader? Do you think the editor believes in what he's compiled?
2. Throughout *Riddance*, two recurring scenes of trauma and abuse are repeated and rearranged; the killing of Sybil's rabbit by her father, and her mother's gruesome murder—also by her father. Did anything strike you in the ways these traumatic moments move through the book? What can this tell us about the relationship between trauma and memory? Trauma and death?
3. Grandison, the biracial secretary responsible for the “the stenographer’s story,” is faced with racism as a young student at the Vocational School. At one point, she wonders why white folks “were not more fearful of the ghosts they had wronged” (303). How do you think race factors into the relationships within the school? The actual act of channelling the dead?
4. The final dispatch weaves through time and place, with a distant goal (of saving Finster) coming in and out of focus. Is there a plot to this dispatch? Does plot matter?
5. *Riddance* is remarkable in its use of drawings, diagrams, scanned “documents,” and other forms of multimedia. Some of these images are explained, some are left for interpretation. Which ones are you curious about? What do you think they mean?
6. Grandison's visions of sexuality and the body are different than most girls—she has an arousing dream about Dr. Peachie pulling out her tongue. Elsewhere, a girl named Candace is taken away after a miscarriage. How do you feel sex and sexuality are presented at the Vocational School, particularly in a place so concerned with the physical body?
7. Which letter to dead author's most interested in you, and why? If you could choose a dead author to write to, who would you pick? What would you say?
8. “Death is not dreadful—it is not anything. Does that comfort me? It does not,” says Headmistress Joines in a letter to Ishmael. Are you afraid of death? Do you think, within the universe of this book, death is something to fear?
9. *Riddance* is a book that begins and ends with murder. The editor herself posits that the Regional School Inspector was killed either by the original Headmistress or Grandison. Re-read the murder scene—who do you think did it? Does it matter?
10. At the end of the book, in Appendix B, there are “Instructions for Saying a Sentence.” Follow these instructions carefully. If you channel any ghosts, we'd love to know.

