



## THE DEATH DEFYING PEPPER ROUX by Geraldine McCaughrean

1

'On the morning of his fourteenth birthday, Pepper had been awake for fully two minutes before realizing it was the day he must die.'

Does this first sentence strike you as an unusual way to begin a book? Why is Pepper fated to die at this young age? How does he know he is about to die?

What is the significance of the book's title?

How would you feel if you knew you were about to die? Would you do what Pepper does?

2

How does Pepper come by such an unusual name? Why is his name such a key part of his identity?

Throughout the book, Pepper assumes and discards identities quite freely. Why does he do this? How many of his different identities can you name?

Have you ever been called by a different name? If you could choose your own name, what would it be?

3

Pepper first denies his true identity (page 10) before he runs away to sea. Why is this such an important moment for him?

Who does Pepper first claim to be? Why does he choose to pass himself off as this person? How convincing is he?

4

How does Pepper get on with the rest of the crew? Why is his relationship with Duchesse so important? How does the death of Roche affect the crew's attitude towards their captain?

Why does Pepper not send the letter informing Roche's widow of her husband's death?

5

*'If there was one skill he had mastered, it was changing roles...'* (page 151).

Think of all the different jobs that Pepper takes on during the course of the book. Why does he change jobs so frequently?

How successful is he at these different roles? In which do you think, he is particularly well suited? Which of Pepper's jobs do you think you might be best suited to?



6  
Is Pepper a very religious boy? Where has he obtained most of his information about religion? Is this information always to be trusted?

Why is the church so important to Pepper?

When he makes his confession to the priest at St Constance's, what sins does he confess to? Is he really guilty of these sins?

If not, why is he making them up? Isn't that another sin?

7  
When Pepper takes on the role of a journalist, what kind of stories does he write? Why does he make them up?

Despite the fact that Abaron Pepper-Papier's stories are completely fictitious, they are popular with readers? How do you account for this?

8  
*"Honest had he said?" The very word tasted of soap.*" (page 110)

Why does the word 'honest' taste of soap for Pepper? What is the association he makes between the two?

Is Pepper a naturally dishonest person do you think, or is he merely creative with the truth?

Was Aunt Miriam right to make Pepper drink soap to stop him telling lies?

9  
Towards the end of the book, one of the major problems that Pepper has to deal with is his loneliness.  
What does he do to try and counteract this?

Do you think some of the other characters in the book are lonely, too? What about Duchesse and Yvette Roche? Is this the glue that holds the trio together at the end?

Does Pepper found himself a new family? Do you think they're an improvement on his original family? Do they deserve each other?

10  
*'A boy with a good heart in the heart of a bad city.'*

How well does this phrase sum up the book? To what extent can we view this story as a modern morality tale?

Is the tension between good and evil characters well balanced?

What lies in store for Pepper and his new family – the Barons?

And what of Gilbert Roux, his wife and her sister? Do they get what they deserve?

