



# The Ministry of Special Cases

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathan Englander is a bestselling author at the very forefront of contemporary American fiction. Englander's short fiction has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, and numerous anthologies including *The Best American Short Stories*, *The O. Henry Prize Stories*, and *The Pushcart Prize*. His story collection *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* earned him a PEN/Faulkner Malamud Award and the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Englander's most recent collection of short stories, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank*, published in 2012, was the winner of the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. (Alfred A. Knopf)

## OTHER WORKS BY AUTHOR NATHAN ENGLANDER

- For the Relief of Unbearable Urges
- What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank

## GUIDE TO THE CHARACTERS

**Kaddish:** The son of prostitute Favorita, makes a living defacing grave

**Lillian:** Kaddish's wife, insurance clerk

**Pato:** son to Lillian and Kaddish, university student

**Cacho:** their neighbor

**Gustavo:** Lillian's boss, owner of the insurance company

**Rafa:** Pato's university friend

**Flavia:** Pato's university friend

**Mazursky:** Plastic surgeon who hires Kaddish to deface the grave of his father

**Feigenblum:** President of the United Congregations of Argentina

**Navigator:** directly involved in the "disappearances"

**General:** A part of the junta, a very powerful man

**Theresa:** His wealthy wife

## Discussion Questions framed by Gloria Borg Olds

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1. Why did Englander choose to tell this dark story? What is redemptive about it?
2. How do you grapple with the relationship between this father and son?
3. What is the difference in Lillian (mother) and Kaddish (father) at beginning and by the end of the novel?
4. What is the meaning of the plastic surgery/defacing identity plot line? Does it work?
5. Why does the author choose to make main character a criminal?
6. Does the author succeed in making total chaos of the Ministry – of making fascism - clear?
7. Are you more like Lillian or Kaddish – who do you imagine yourself behaving like? Where would you be on the social spectrum that Englander offers?
8. Why does Englander include the scene of the Girl in the tube?
9. What is the relationship between Argentina and the Holocaust?
10. How does Englander portray the way fascism works?
11. How do friends, colleagues, acquaintances react to Kaddish and Lillian's situation?

For information about the Jews of Argentina, The Dirty War and Death & the Body in Judaism & Argentine Culture, visit the "**For Further Investigation**" page on our website: <http://jewishtheatrecolaborative.org/ministry-investigation.html>