***Nutshell***   
Ian McEwan, 2016Knopf Doubleday208 pp.ISBN-13: 9780385542074

**Summary**  
Trudy has betrayed her husband, John. She's still in the marital home—a dilapidated, priceless London townhouse—but John's not there.  
  
Instead, she's with his brother, the profoundly banal Claude, and the two of them have a plan.  
  
But there is a witness to their plot: the inquisitive, nine-month-old resident of Trudy's womb.  
  
Told from a perspective unlike any other, Nutshell is a classic tale of murder and deceit from one of the world’s master storytellers. (From the publisher.)

**Discussion Questions**  
*We'll add publisher questions if and when they're available; in the meantime, consider these LitLovers talking points to help start a discussion for*Nutshell*...then take off on your own*:  
  
1. One obvious place to start a discussion is with the entire conceit: a brilliant, verbally gifted fetus talking to us from his mother's womb. Does McEwan pull it off? Are you able to suspend your disbelief in order to be drawn into baby Hamlet's nutshell of a world? Or are you put off by the whole conceit?  
  
2. Another discussion opener would be the many allusions to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The title itself is taken from a line in the Act II, in which Hamlet says,

*Oh god, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams*.

Beyond the obvious (i.e., womb = nutshell), how else does does Hamlet's line resonate in Ian McEwan's novel? What, for instance, are this neonatal Hamlet's "bad dreams"? What are some of the other parallels to the Bard's play, especially the play Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" dilemma. Many other literary allusions can be found within—can you identify some of them (i.e., John Donne, *Macbeth*, *Lolita*, Kafka, to name a few)?  
  
3. Describe the three adult characters: John, Trudy, and Claude. Do you find any of them likable? Who is the Ophelia?

4. Our narrator also comments on the world at large. Consider, for instance, "Europa's secular dreams of union may dissolve before the old hatreds." What other disasters or fears are on his horizon? And what else does McEwan, as a satirist, take aim at. How do modern-day Londoners come off?  
  
7. By virtue of his location in the womb, this miniature Hamlet has a "front row" seat in his mother's life: he has access to her most intimate conversations and actions, including her sexual relationship with Claude. Would you consider him a reliable narrator...or unreliable? In other words, does he fully comprehend the outside world? Is he objective in his observations and judgments, or do his own interests cloud his understanding?  
  
7. Did you laugh?  
  
8. Consider reading [this interview with McEwan in the Wall St. Journal](http://www.wsj.com/articles/ian-mcewan-on-nutshell-and-its-extraordinary-narrator-1472491905) for some thoughts about the author's inspiration for his fetus as a narrator.  
  
(*Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks*.)