


“One of those books you devour in a single sitting.”  
—Alex Marwood, author of *The Wicked Girls*



THE  
DEAD  
GIRL  
IN 2A

A NOVEL

CARTER WILSON

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# Reading Group Guide

1. When we first meet Jake, he is struggling to come to terms with his responsibility for the car accident that wounded his daughter. How is he dealing with the guilt he feels? How much responsibility do you think he bears for the accident? Have you ever been in a situation where you felt responsible for hurting someone close to you?
2. *The Dead Girl in 2A* is a book about memory and how the things we remember or forget shape our lives. How do you think Jake's life would have been different if he had never forgotten the things that happened to him as a child? How might his life have been different if he never sat down next to Clara on the flight to Denver? Are there things from your own past that you wish you could forget, or do you feel that all your experiences have made you the person you are today?
3. When Clara announces to Jake that she intends to kill herself, he feels a deep sense of responsibility to stop her from doing it. How do you think you would react if you were put in the same

situation? Would you do anything to try to prevent the death of a stranger? If so, what?

4. Jake and Clara both agree to participate in Landis's trial. What do you see as their motivations for doing so?
5. *The Dead Girl in 2A* is written in multiple points of view. Did you feel more connected to the story through one point of view versus another? How do you think having access to the internal thoughts of multiple characters affected your understanding of the story?
6. Many of the characters in *The Dead Girl in 2A* have faced trauma in their pasts. How do you think each character has coped with the events they lived through? How do their coping mechanisms line up with what you know or have experienced regarding the aftermath of traumatic events?
7. Part of the narrative is closely tied to the Maroon Bells, a significant place to several of the characters. Do you have a place in the world that feels significant to you or that you are drawn to time and again? If so, why do you think that is?

# A Conversation with the Author

***The Dead Girl in 2A* has a very clear theme: memory. Why did you decide to tackle the idea of memory and how it shapes us in this book?**

A lot of my books deal with memory in one way or another. I think a large part of this stems from my father's death at the age of sixty-nine from Alzheimer's-related issues. One of my greatest fears is losing my memory, and I think somehow it's therapeutic for me to write about it. Beyond that, memory is simply fascinating. It's this intangible, weightless, disembodied thing that makes up so much of who we are, guides so many of our decisions, and forms our opinions about emotions ranging from happiness to terror. We are our memories, and we don't even really understand them.

**Why did you choose the Maroon Bells as a significant place in this story?**

Though I live in Colorado, I don't set many scenes here. In general, I like to write about places I'm not all that familiar with,

because then I get to discover a new world. But in crafting this story, I knew I wanted a secluded mountain area as the setting for the school, and I wanted a location that plausibly had an air of the fantastic about it (like the Oceanic survivors' island in *Lost*). The Maroon Bells has that kind of mystique, and I thought it would provide the kind of setting necessary to imprint so strongly on my characters.

**You have published several previous novels. Does it get easier to write the longer you have been doing it? Was there anything particularly challenging about writing this novel?**

Some things get easier the more you write: setting the scene, establishing the flow, driving the pace. The part that doesn't get easier is the most enjoyable aspect of writing for me: figuring out what the hell the story is all about. I don't outline, so I tend to write a series of events that I find interesting without a whole lot of idea as to where the story is going. About halfway through a novel, I'll start to take a look at the book's trajectory and make some decisions about direction, but even those decisions are subject to change as I continue on. It's not uncommon that a major plot point occurs to me 75 percent in, and that realization often changes much of what I've already written.

*The Dead Girl in 2A* is very much a book that, in the process of its creation, had several threads I needed to tie together but wasn't sure how. In that regard, it was probably the most difficult book I've written to date. But I loved finding new ways to evolve the plot, close open loops, and (hopefully) keep the reader guessing. Every story line is a problem to be solved, and I love solving problems.

**Did you do any research to bring this novel to life?**

I did. I researched locations, covert government programs, the effects of scopolamine on the human brain, memory loss, among other things. Definitely more research than normal for me, and I have to say it was a lot of fun. I just wouldn't want anyone looking at my internet cache.

What does your writing process look like? Do you always write in the same place at the same time every day?

I write in the mornings and/or evenings. It's important for me to be consistent in location and time when I write, because writing is a job and it should be treated that way. If I wrote only when I "felt the muse," I'd never get anything done. I need to sit down and type regardless of my mood, and that's most easily achieved with a firm schedule. In the mornings, it's a coffee shop; in the evenings, it's in a leather chair at home, or perhaps sipping a margarita in a bar.

**If you could have lunch with any writer, dead or alive, who would you choose, and what would you talk with him or her about?**

I'd dine with the late Douglas Adams (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). I don't know what I'd ask him specifically, but I imagine he has some hysterical stories to tell. I'd just sit back and listen.

**What is the best piece of writing advice you have ever received? How about the worst?**

It's a cliché, but the best advice is *put your ass in the chair and write*. Seriously, it doesn't get any simpler than that, but somehow the actual act of writing is the biggest obstacle for aspiring writers. Everyone has an idea, but it's hard work writing the idea out. Like



anything else, it takes practice and repetition. If you write every day, you will eventually write a book. It might suck, but, hey, you wrote a book! The more you write, the better you will become at it.

I think the worst advice (at least for me) is to read as much as possible within your own genre. I say read what you like to read, and write what you like to write. Maybe those two realms intersect; maybe they don't. I love to read memoirs, historical nonfiction, literary fiction, short stories, essays, a bit of horror, and, of course, thrillers. I find that writers who read obsessively within a genre in order to "crack the code" are the least likely to come up with an original story.