

## Murder List Discussion Questions

by Hank Phillippi Ryan

### Author Bio: (from *Fantastic Fiction* & Hank Phillippi Ryan's website)

Hank Phillippi Ryan is the on-air investigative reporter for Boston's NBC affiliate. She's won 30 Emmy's, 12 Edward R. Murrow awards, and dozens of other honors for her ground-breaking journalism.



A bestselling author of mystery novels, Ryan has won multiple prestigious awards for her crime fiction: five Agathas, four Anthonys, and the Mary Higgins Clark Award. She's the only author to have won the Agatha in four different categories: Best First, Best Novel, Best Short Story, and Best Non-Fiction. [The Murder List](#), won the Anthony Award for Best Novel. Ryan's on the national board of Mystery Writers of America, former president of Sisters in Crime, and founder of MWA University.

Ryan lives in Boston with her husband, a nationally renowned civil rights and criminal defense attorney.

### Characters:

- **Rachel North** – (36) – In Harvard Law School. Summer internship with the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office (near Boston) under Assistant District Attorney Martha Gardiner. Married to Jack Kirkland, a lawyer, for 6 years. Formerly worked as an aide for Senator Thomas Rafferty, the president of the Senate.
- **Jack Kirkland** – Lawyer. Married to Rachel North. Works for the "Committee for Public Counsel Services" (the public defender's office).
- **Martha Leggett Gardiner** – Assistant district attorney. Rachel's new boss. Known for winning cases unmercifully.
- **Jeffrey Paul Baltrim** – (28) Pizza delivery guy accused of killing Tassie Lyle. Lizann Wallace's client.
- **Logan Concannon** – Senator Rafferty's chief of staff. Resigns. Rachel North is promoted to her position.
- **Leon Colacetti** – Ms. Gardiner's assistant.
- **Deacon Davis** – Accused of murdering Doctor Georgina Oreoso at an ATM. Jack Kirkland defended him at the trial. Rachel North was on the jury. Sister is Latrelle. Is killed in prison 6 years later.
- **Andrew DiPrado** – Summer internship with the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office.
- **Ralph Dryborough** – Judge in the Danielle Zander murder trial.
- **Elijah Lansberry** – "Eli" – Summer internship with the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office.
- **Tassie Lyle** – Nurse who was murdered. Pizza guy, Jeffrey Baltrim, main suspect.
- **Phillip Ong** – Medical examiner.
- **Nina Perini Rafferty** – Married to Senator Thomas Rafferty. Accused of murdering Danielle Zander.

- **Thomas Rafferty** – Senator. Married to Nina Perini. Rachel's boss at her previous job.
- **Annabella Rigalosa** – Human Resources director for the State house.
- **Clea Rourke** – News Reporter. Dated Jack Kirkland before Rachel.
- **Judge Saunders** – Judge on the Deacon Davis trial. Rachel was one of his jurors.
- **Nick Soderberg** – Summer internship with the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office.
- **Kurt Suddeth** – Court officer in the Deacon Davis trial.
- **Lizann Wallace** – Defense attorney defending Jeffrey Baltrim. Used to be Gardiner's assistant.
- **Danielle "Dani" Zander** – (28). Aide who took Rachel's old job with Senator Rafferty when Rachel was promoted. Murdered.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This book is titled "Murder List." What is a murder list and why would the author have made it the title of this book?
3. There are two storylines in this novel – present day Rachel North as an intern in the prosecutor's office and past Rachel North - Chief of Staff for Senator Rafferty. Did having the two timelines work or did you find it confusing? Why or why not?
4. This story was told from multiple points of view – primarily Rachel North, but also through Jack Kirkland and Martha Gardiner. Did having the other points of view help or hurt the novel. Why?
5. What genre would you place this novel in? Legal thriller? Psychological thriller? Something else? Why?
6. How did you like the pacing of the novel? Did it keep your attention? Why or why not?
7. Who was your favorite character? Who was your least favorite character? Why?
8. Our last book, **My Sister's Grave**, had people faking evidence to get someone convicted. **Murder List** looks at the trial from both sides – the Defense and the Prosecution. Did this book make you rethink the line, "Better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer"? Do you believe that is a true statement? Why or why not? How does this book embody and refute that quote at the same time?
9. Should a trial be named after the murder victim or the defendant? (Example: Deacon Davis trial vs the Georgina Oreoso trial.) Do you think a trial's name makes a difference between how people judge guilt in a trial? Who "names" the trial? The press? Is it arbitrary?
10. Word use can often change the way a person feels about a topic. Discuss the differences in tone and emotion between the phrases "illicit relationship," "adultery," "side piece," and "mistress". Do you think people chose words/phrases as a conscious way to manipulate a narrative?

11. If an accused person is never convicted and no one is ever found guilty of the crime, is the accused still seen as guilty? Does the scandal of being accused of a crime ever go away? Why or why not?
12. On page 209, Rachel says, "Lawyers know the rules and that was the only way to get ahead." What does that tell you about Rachel and how she thinks?
13. Do you think Deacon Davis killed Doctor Georgina Oreoso at the ATM or was he unjustly convicted?
14. Do you think Jeffrey Baltrim, the pizza guy, killed Tassie Lyle? Why or why not. The book does not tell you of his fate. Why do you think this is left unresolved?
15. Did you know who killed Danielle Zander before was before it was revealed?
16. How did the book's ending/last scene make you feel? Did it change the way you felt before that last chapter? Did it engender more or less sympathy in you?
17. Once everything is over and done with, what do you think Jack Kirkland should do?
18. Considering the plot twist at the end of the book, did it make you want to go back and reread the book/ certain scenes to take a different look at the clues and the way things played out? Why or why not?
19. Hank Phillippi Ryan has written a number of other books. Will you read them?

### References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/r/hank-ryan/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/41556064-the-murder-list>
- McMillian -- <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781250222435>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=4&sid=1832a878-a6e9-4582-87a4-c29ca83c204b%40sessionmgr4008&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#U=10795328&db=neh>
- Reading Room – <https://www.readingroom-readmore.com/2019/08/the-murder-list-by-hank-phillippi-ryan.html>
- Hank Phillippi Ryan – <https://hankphillipryan.com/>

## Hank Phillippi Ryan's Books

### Charlotte McNally Mystery

1. Prime Time (2007)
2. Face Time (2007)
3. Air Time (2009)
4. Drive Time (2010)

### Jane Ryland

1. The Other Woman (2012)
2. The Wrong Girl (2013)
3. Truth Be Told (2014)
4. What You See (2015)
5. Say No More (2016)

## Stand Alone Novels

- Trust Me (2018)
  - The Murder List (2019)
  - The First to Lie (2020)
  - Her Perfect Life (2021)
- 

### If you liked The Murder List, try...

- A Good Marriage – Kimberky McCreight
  - The Ex – Alafair Burke
  - Lady Killer – Lisa Scottoline
  - The Associate – John Grisham
  - Testimony – Scott Turow
-