Walt by Russell Wangersky

1. Walt has very elevated vocabulary, reminiscent of the European professor Humbert Humbert in Nabokov's *Lolita*. How well does his word choice fit with his character? How does it compare to other major literary characters?

2. Walt is an unreliable narrator. What is the first indication you had that he might not be trustworthy? Are there moments when you think Walt lies outright?

3. To what degree do you think Walt believes what he is saying? Are there any scenes that you think might consist merely of delusions and fantasy? Why?

4. What about the novel locates it specifically in Newfoundland? Could the story take place elsewhere? Which aspects of it would need to change?

5. *Walt* is predominantly composed of male perspectives: those of the middle-aged bachelor and the damaged detective. How do Alisha's diary entries work to balance these point of views? Would the book be improved if Alisha had a stronger presence in the novel, or would introducing her as a more prominent voice turn *Walt* into a different book altogether?

6. Walt may be guilty of terrible crimes, but he does come across as a sympathetic character some of the time. What tactics does Wangersky use that make you identify with Walt?

7. What happens between the end of chapter 52 (when Walt speaks to Alisha in her empty house) and the start of 53 (when the police knock on Walt's door again)? Why do you think Wangersky ends the story this way?

8. Technology is always changing, and references to specific technology brands can make stories feel dated not long after publication. In order to avoid this pitfall, many writers either avoid brand names, or write in an alternate present where characters rarely use cell phones or the Internet. Wangersky, however, takes the risk of interacting with technology: his novel involves cyberstalking and the plot rests on the use of current communications technologies. How well do you think Wangersky integrates technology? Will *Walt* seem dated five years from now? Why or why not?

9. The narrative in *Walt* does not follow a linear progression and instead skips unpredictably through space and time. Is this an effective strategy for holding your attention as the reader? What could Wangersky do differently?

10. Do the grocery lists that appear at the outset of a number of chapters (or Walt's philosophical thoughts on them) have thematic resonance within the chapters they precede? If so, how are they linked?

11. During a panel at the Toronto Reference Library in 2013 the American novelist Jonathan Lethem said that a major focus in Canadian literary writing at the present time is blending literary fiction with stock elements from commercial genre fiction. He mentioned Margaret Atwood's *Oryx & Crake* trilogy (sci-fi), Andrew Pyper's *The Demonologist* (occult thriller), and Patrick deWitt's *The Sisters Brothers* (western). One could argue that Wangersky's *Walt* also fits into this movement. How would you describe *Walt's* genre blend? Does Wangersky mix his genres into a unified whole, or do you notice distinct shifts in genre throughout the book?

12. Why do you think the Canadian trend of mixing literary elements with genre elements has emerged now?

13. Exploring the mind of a disturbed killer rather than just following the police investigation has been a hallmark of crime TV in the last decade. How well do you think *Walt* would transfer to TV? Which shows would you take as inspiration? Which would you avoid? Why?

14. How did your emotional state change throughout reading the book? Where did you feel most uncomfortable?