

## Questions on The Soloist

1. Ayers and Lopez come to their relationship from very different places in life. Does friendship have to be borne out of a relationship of, roughly, “equals”? What is your life experience?
2. Readers of Lopez’s columns begin to donate instruments and money almost immediately following Steve’s first article. What do you think compels people to help a stranger? Do you believe that people would have been as eager to help Nathaniel had Steve not written about him and his plight? What do you think this says about human nature in general?
3. By writing numerous columns following the progression of events with Ayers, Lopez is in effect making money from the stories. Do you think this creates some level of responsibility for Ayers’ safety and wellbeing?
4. Lopez struggles with the extent to which Ayers can be enticed or pushed into treatment. Is it ethical to force a mentally ill person into treatment against their will?
5. Does Nathaniel Ayers feel he has a purpose in this world? If so, what do you believe that to be?
6. Both Steve Lopez and Nathaniel Ayers find inspiration in their writing and music through different means. What are they and how do you find inspiration?
7. In what ways does Nathaniel’s story fit your preconceptions about people facing homelessness, and in what ways has it changed your ideas?
8. As you read about Nathaniel’s time at Julliard, what circumstances do you think made him particularly vulnerable? While schizophrenia is not a preventable condition, what kinds of support could have been helpful as Nathaniel became progressively less able to function?
9. Nathaniel’s story sheds light on the plight of the homeless and mentally ill of Skid Row. We typically think about that type of poverty and homelessness in less developed countries. What do you think this says about our culture?

Questions adapted from

<http://virtuallibrary.cincinnati.org:8000/OTSP/2009/questions.aspx>

<http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/soloist.html>

<http://www.csun.edu/afye/Soloist-at-CSUN-Main-Page.html>  
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