**Book Title:** Close to a Killer

**Author:** Marsha Qualey

**Genre:** YA Mystery

**Age Appropriateness**
- **Interest level** – The protagonist is a high school junior.
- **Subject/content maturity** – Mild profanity, violence (murders), drug usage

**Elements of the Review**
- **Plot summary** – The setting is a large northern city. The protagonist, Barrie, works in her mother’s hair salon. The salon employs convicted murderers who met in prison. Barrie’s mother had been sentenced to seven years in prison after planning an environmental protest which resulted in the death of a guard. Barrie had been living with her father and stepmother in the suburbs until they moved to France. Barrie finds herself immersed in homicide investigations after three people associated with her mother’s salon end up dead. Barrie deals with her loneliness by writing, all the while trying to help a homicide detective solve the crimes. She does help solve the mystery, becomes closer to her mother, and experiences success as a writer.
- **Literary devices** – The book is written in third person limited point of view (Barrie) and is written chronologically.
- **Conflict** – The major conflicts are man vs. man and man vs. himself.
- **Characters** – The novel is well done in terms of developing Barrie’s character. It also allows the reader to think about stereotypes regarding ex-cons.
- **Theme** – value to reader, multiple themes-- The themes of the value of forgiveness and acceptance are easily discernible.
- **Style** – sentence patterns, word choice, figurative language -- The novel is a very readable, well written, intriguing mystery.
- **Cultural references, audience appeal**– There are few cultural references which would date the novel as being written in 1999. The book would most likely appeal to high school students who like mysteries.
- **Diversity** – There are both Caucasian and African-American characters. There is also a mix of law-abiding citizens and former prison inmates.
- **Readability** – if discernable, what read level is the book? The book is an easy read; the publisher lists the reading level as 5.7.
- **Awards** – The book received no awards other than A New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age; however, the book contains positive reviews from KLIATT, Kirkus Reviews, School Library Journal, Booklist, The Bulletin, and Twist.
Reading Skills/Benchmarks

- Identification of any FCAT reading benchmarks that are particularly addressed or matched to the book—Benchmarks addressed could include LA.E.2.4.1 (plot development, conflicts, and resolutions) and LA.A.2.4.1 (main ideas and details).

Connections:

- Cross-curricular—The book might tie in with a social studies class in terms of rehabilitation of former convicts.
- Serial or non-serial—The book does not appear to be part of a series.
- Recommendations of similar books—The author also wrote Thin Ice, which was an ALA Quick Pick and an Edgar Award nominee.

Audience Recommendation

- Select level –The book is recommended for high school students and adults.
- Reading approach that the book most lends itself -- The book could be used in any of these reading approaches.