

# READING GROUP GUIDE

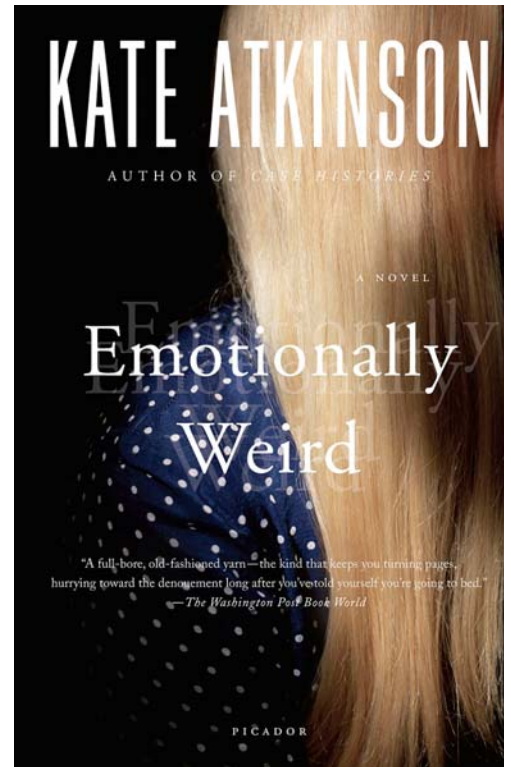
## *Emotionally Weird*

*A Novel*

*by Kate Atkinson*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Emotionally Weird* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Emotionally Weird*.

### About the Book

On a weather-beaten island off the coast of Scotland, Effie and her mother, Nora, take refuge in the large, mouldering house of their ancestors and tell each other stories. Nora, at first, recounts nothing that Effie really wants to hear—like who her real father was. Effie tells various versions of her life at college, where she lives in a lethargic relationship with Bob, a student who never goes to lectures, seldom gets out of bed, and to whom Klingons are as real as Spaniards or

## Praise for *Emotionally Weird*:

"A sparkling comic meditation on how authors choose to tell their stories."—*Entertainment Weekly* (grade: A-)

"A full-bore, old-fashioned yarn--the kind that keeps you turning pages, hurrying toward the denouement long after you've told yourself you're going to bed."—*The Washington Post Book World*

"Reads like the fictional equivalent of a magic trick; you might wonder how she pulls it off, but you're certain to marvel at the results."—*Harper's Bazaar*

"Atkinson has found her best subject, thereby letting out the secret to writing a truly funny comic novel."—*Newsday*

## About the Author

**Kate Atkinson** was born in York, and earned her master's degree in English at Dundee University. While raising her two daughters, she held a variety of jobs, from university tutor to welfare benefits administrator, and always wrote, publishing short stories in British magazines. Her first novel, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, won England's prestigious Whitbread Book of the Year award in 1995, and became an international bestseller. Her second novel, *Human Croquet*, was also an acclaimed bestseller. She lives in Edinburgh, Scotland.

## Discussion Questions

1. Reviewers have noted that his novel is the equivalent of a magic trick. How does Atkinson accomplish this?
2. Consider, for example, Effie's writing assignment on Henry James's critique of *Middlemarch* as a formless collection of detail. Could the same be said of Effie's story and *Emotionally Weird* as a whole? Can you think of other instances where Atkinson seems to be tricking her audience? What does this narrative technique say about Atkinson's view on writing and language?
3. Paranoia and the feeling of being watched—the constant reference to eyes and looking, Bob's paranoid exclamations, and even Atkinson's own linguistic agility, which reminds readers of her presence—is a theme which is present throughout the novel. How does this theme affect the narrative? Does it create suspense? To what degree is this feeling a fabrication and to what degree is it a reality in the world of the novel?
4. What does Atkinson's use of different fonts for the various narratives in the story accomplish in terms of storytelling and writing? Did you find it effective?

5. Is it clear that the narrator is extremely self-conscious—so much so, that she's constantly rewriting her own life story. How does this level of self-consciousness affect her credibility as a narrator? How do the constant interruptions to Effie's storytelling (the water boiling, the wind, etc.) affect the autobiographical genre that Atkinson is exploring here?
6. The sequences with Effie and Nora on the island seem to take place in the present, that is to say, all the other narratives are stories from Effie and Nora's past (and imagination) that they recount to each other. Why is it, then, that it is precisely these sequences that have the most dream-like quality about them and seem to be the most surreal? What does this say about the novel as a whole?
7. As the narrative progresses, more and more characters enter the story. Nora even makes a complaint to Effie, saying that there are far too many minor and side characters (p. 167). Moreover, most of these characters are also writing their own novels; even Effie herself is writing a murder mystery. How does this issue of writing about writing fit into the larger theme of the novel? What does it say about writing itself?
8. The shaggy yellow dog is a character in his own right. What does the dog represent in the novel? What is his function?
9. What does *Emotionally Weird* say about relationships between mothers and daughters? Does Effie's relationship with Nora progress or regress by the book's end?

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