

Life After Life

Reading group topics

1. In the epigraph, Kate Atkinson quotes Edward Beresford Todd (Teddy): 'What if we had a chance to do it again and again, until we finally did get it right? Wouldn't that be wonderful?' Do you agree that the chance to live life over and over, as Ursula does, would be wonderful? What do you think are the advantages or disadvantages of being able to start life again from scratch –or indeed, of being able to redirect destiny by making tiny adjustments to the course of our lives?
2. Some of the most dramatic scenes in the novel take place during the Blitz. Kate Atkinson has said: 'If I could choose one period in history to return to, it would be London during that time. I can see that some people might consider that an odd choice but think what an extraordinary experience it would be'. What do you think made World War II and the Blitz such an extraordinary time for the British? And if you could choose any period in history to visit, which would it be?
3. What did you think of the structure of *Life After Life*? Did you find yourself flicking back to earlier pages as you were reading? What effect do you think the non-linear, circular pattern had on your reading experience? Does it remind you of any other novels you have read?
4. Jackson Brodie, the main character in Kate Atkinson's four previous novels, once said that things improve but they don't get better. Can that statement be applied to *Life After Life*?
5. Ursula experiences a number of different kinds of relationships with men, and a variety of career choices, as she lives the different versions of her life. What do you think these alternate paths in her life say about the choices that were available to women during this period?
6. 'History is all about what ifs', says a character near the end of *Life After Life*. It certainly opens with one powerful historical 'what if?', that of Ursula shooting Hitler in Munich in 1930. What do you think this does in terms of setting up the reader's expectations?
7. How did you feel when you got to the end of the novel? Were you happy with Teddy's return? And what do you think about how Kate Atkinson ends the novel with the midwife Mrs Haddock back in the Blue Lion pub, sipping her hot rum?
8. Sarah Crompton, in the *Daily Telegraph*, wrote that Kate Atkinson has most often been compared to Charles Dickens, for her complex plotting and multifaceted characters, but that *Life After Life* reminds her of Jane Austen, 'whose writing is also full of a sense of might-have-been'. Do you think these comparisons are justified?
9. The Jackson Brodie novels have been characterised by many as crime novels. Some might define *Life After Life* as a historical novel. Do you think that Kate Atkinson's writing can and

should be classified into any particular fiction genre? Can you think of any other writers to compare her to?

10. Many reviewers hailed *Life After Life* as an ambitious and brilliant novel that should win prizes. Yet it was overlooked by the judges of the 2013 Man Booker Prize. Put yourself in the shoes of a literary prize judge: what would you have done?