

## When Will There Be Good News?

### *Reading Group Guide*

1. Kate Atkinson is an author formerly known as a prize-winning 'literary' writer, but with the three Jackson Brodie novels, she has introduced elements of the traditional crime novel. What do you think turns a novel into a 'crime' novel? Don't *all* good novels that catch the public imagination have elements of the crime novel: a sense of suspense, a mystery, a violent death or two? What crime novel conventions can you discern in this book?
2. Kate Atkinson always creates very strong female characters. What do you think about the women in this novel – Dr Hunter, Reggie, Louise? And what about the men: are they generally weaker than the women, and does this make it a feminist novel?
3. The initial tragedy that opens the books is reminiscent of familiar high-profile news stories, like the Rachel Nickell, Abigail Witchalls or Megan and Josie Russell cases. What is it about those cases of random violence that make them so very haunting? Does it have something to do with the fact that when mothers are attacked they can't run, because they feel the need to stay and protect their children?
4. Similarly, it would appear that Kate Atkinson used the Selby train crash as the inspiration for the train crash in the novel. Discuss the impact of these tragedies on the nation's morale. Do you think Kate speaks for us all when she asks *When Will There Be Good News?*
5. Jackson Brodie believes that 'there are no rules. There isn't a template we're supposed to follow. We make it up as we go along.' Do you feel this statement also applies to Kate Atkinson's writing – and to real life itself?
6. 'How ironic that both Julia and Louise, the two women he'd felt closest to in his recent past, had both unexpectedly got married, and neither of them to him.' Do you think Kate Atkinson should ever allow Jackson Brodie to have a successful romantic relationship? Why do you think he is such an appealing character?
7. Jackson Brodie believes that 'a coincidence is just an explanation waiting to happen.' Discuss the coincidences in the novel. Do they make the story seem more or less real? If Kate Atkinson had written a conventional crime novel, would it be as appropriate to use coincidence to move the plot forward?
8. There are 'good' characters and 'evil' characters in the novel, but Kate Atkinson is rarely black and white in her portrayal of either. Louise, Reggie and Jackson Brodie are essentially 'good', but will break the law to achieve the 'right' result. What is the moral code at work in the novel?
9. 'As in the best crime fiction, dramatic events and unexpected twists abound, but Atkinson subverts the genre by refusing to neatly tie up every thread.' (*Independent*). Did you notice any loose threads in the plot?
10. The British pride themselves on their dry wit in the face of adversity. Despite the bleakness of the subject matter and the streak of sadness running through the novel, Kate Atkinson's writing is often very funny. What did you find humorous about the book, and do you think that it's a particularly British sort of humour?