

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Ian McEwan's novel

ATONEMENT

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Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the hardcover edition of *Atonement*. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for *Atonement* has been prepared and written by Marilyn Herbert, originator of Bookclub-in-a-Box. Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed., is a teacher, librarian, speaker, and writer. Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction and classic literature intended for book club discussions, educational study seminars, and personal pleasure. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for Atonement

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Readers and Leaders Guide

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is clearly and effectively organized to give you information and ideas for a lively discussion, as well as to present the major highlights of the novel. The format, with a Table of Contents, allows you to pick and choose the specific points you wish to talk about. It does not have to be used in any prescribed order. In fact, it is meant to support, not determine, your discussion.

You Choose What to Use.

You may find that some information is repeated in more than one section and may be cross-referenced so as to provide insight on the same idea from different angles.

How to Begin

Relax and look forward to enjoying your bookclub.

With Bookclub-in-a-Box as your behind the scenes support, there is little for you to do in the way of preparation.

Some readers like to review the guide after reading the novel; some before. Either way, the guide is all you will need as a companion for your discussion. You may find that the guide's interpretation, information, and background have sparked other ideas not included.

Having read the novel and armed with Bookclub-in-a-Box, you will be well prepared to lead or guide or listen to the discussion at hand.

Lastly, if you need some more "hands on" support, feel free to contact us.

What to Look For

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is divided into easy-to-use sections, which include points on characters, themes, writing style and structure, literary or historical background, author information, and other pertinent features unique to the novel being discussed. These may vary slightly from guide to guide.

INTERPRETATION OF EACH NOVEL REFLECTS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX TEAM.

Do We Need to Agree?

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NO.

If we have sparked a discussion or a debate on certain points, then we are happy. We invite you to share your group's alternative findings and experiences. You can contact us via our website (www.bookclubinabox.com), by email (info@bookclubinabox.com), or by phone (1-866-578-5571). We would love to hear from you.

Discussion Starters

There are as many ways to begin a book club discussion as there are members in your group. If you are an experienced group, you will already have your favorite ways to begin. If you are a newly formed group or a group looking for new ideas, here are some suggestions.

Ask for people's impressions of the novel. (This will give you some idea about which parts of the unit to focus on.)

- Identify a favorite or major character.
- Identify a favorite or major idea.
- Begin with a powerful or pertinent quote (not necessarily from the novel).
- Discuss the historical information of the novel (not applicable to all novels).
- If this author is familiar to the group, discuss the range of his/her work and where this novel stands in that range.
- Use the discussion topics and questions in the Bookclub-in-a-Box guide.

If you have further suggestions for discussion starters, be sure to share them with us and we will share them with others.

Above All, Enjoy Yourself

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

Keys to the Novel

Author Information

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

Briony, a pampered 13-year-old and the baby of a family of three children, likes to make up stories and plays. She is mesmerized by the potential of the imaginary world and by the power of words. As a child in an adult world, Briony feels inconsequential and helpless, so she creates a world that she can control through her imagination. She does not yet have the maturity to understand that this pretend world can be encroached upon by the real world.

She discovers this fact when her three visiting cousins decide not to follow her directorial instructions for the play, *The Trials of Arabella*. One word leads to another and Briony abandons the play and wordlessly cancels the production. While sulking, Briony witnesses a scene between Robbie Turner

notes

and Cecilia at the water fountain. Because Briony is too far away, the scene she witnesses is enacted without sound. She is, therefore, left to imagine and interpret the strange sight of Cecilia undressing before Robbie and entering the water to retrieve a vase.

This incident becomes even more significant to Briony later when she reads Robbie's note to Cecilia. Unknown to both Briony and Cecilia, this note is a draft of Robbie's fantasy thoughts and is not intended to include an indiscreet word. The power of the unintended use of this word leads to a sequence of events that ends in Briony's accusation that Robbie has raped Lola. On the basis of this testimony, Robbie is arrested and the story begins... or ends... or does it even exist?

Keys to the Novel

- There is an interesting and significant connection between the novel and McEwan's view of September 11, 2001. He was asked to write an article about the events of that day, and although *Atonement* was already published by that date, McEwan saw a correlation. In his article, McEwan felt that the hijackers would not have been able to carry out their cruel deed if they had been able to imagine the pain of the victims. In other words, what the hijackers were missing was the emotion of empathy.
- McEwan was thinking of his character Briony when he said,

... novels are not about teaching people how to live, but about showing the possibility of what it is like to be someone else. It is the basis of all sympathy, empathy and compassion. Other people are as alive as you are ... You cannot be cruel to someone ... if you are fully aware of what it's like to be them. In other words, you could see cruelty as a failure of the imagination, as a failure of empathy. (Koval)



**Thanks for previewing this
Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide.**

**If you'd like to purchase the full guide in
print or PDF format, just visit:**

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