

## Discussion Questions

### *Case Histories*

by Kate Atkinson

Book Club Meeting

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

6:30 p.m.

1. The three unsolved cases that open **Case Histories** are at first quite separate, and leave you wondering how Atkinson is going to pull it all together into one story. Is she successful? If so, how did she do that?
2. It's clear to the three eldest Land girls that their baby sister Olivia is their parents' favorite child. Do all parents have a special affection for a particular son or daughter? How does Victor and Rosemary's fondness for Olivia affect the personalities and lives of her sisters?
3. Theo idealizes Laura and he is protective of her to a fault --- it's as if he is amazed that such a perfect woman could be the product of a man as imperfect as he. How do Theo's insecurities about himself distort his perception of Laura? How is her untimely death more devastating to Theo and the reader because of her apparent flawlessness? How would Theo's tragedy be different if Laura were different?
4. Michelle derives very little pleasure or joy from motherhood. For her, playing wife and mommy is an almost unbearable burden. Is Michelle a bad mother? Is her attitude toward parenthood any different from Victor's and Rosemary's?
5. When we first meet Jackson, he's sitting in a used sports car, smoking a cigarette, listening to a ladies' radio program, thinking about his beloved daughter and his selfish ex-wife, all while spying on a woman. What kind of first impression does he make on the reader? Is the complexity of his personality endearing, perplexing, or off-putting? How does this first encounter make more sense as the novel progresses?

6. While Amelia and Julia think Olivia might still be alive, poor Theo knows for certain that Laura is dead. At one point, Jackson R admires Theo, thinking: "Just carrying on living required a kind of strength and courage that most people didn't have." Do you agree? Is not knowing the fate of a loved one preferable to being aware of his or her death simply because it allows room for hope? Or does not knowing present a new kind of grief that precludes any opportunity for closure and healing?
  
7. At times, **Case Histories** can be quite gruesome, the tragedies its characters face quite devastating --- and yet Kate Atkinson maintains a sense of humor throughout the book. Is this humor inappropriate, or is there an element of the comic in even the most traumatic of human experiences? How does the humor affect the suspense and mystery?
  
8. Jackson believes 'that his job was to help people be good rather than punish them for being bad.' Another discussion point would be whether you think he is a moral character, and how you feel the revelation of the tragedy in his own past illuminates his actions in the novel.
  
9. 'Novels gave you a completely false idea about life, they told lies and the implied there were endings when in reality there were no endings, everything just went on and on and on.' Is Kate Atkinson being mischievous here, or is this statement true of this novel?