ReadingGroupGuides
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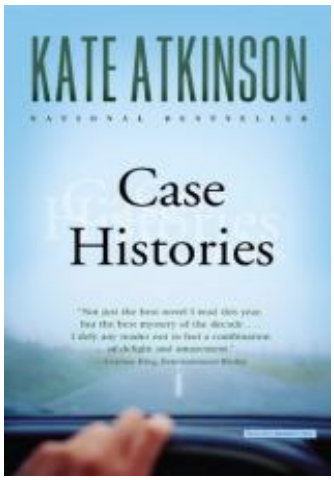
Case Histories

by Kate Atkinson



About the Book

With a trio of compelling "cold case" mysteries at its core; with its wonderfully sympathetic and complex private detective hero; with its host of instantly endearing, lovably flawed characters; and with its effortlessly beautiful and intelligent prose, **Case Histories** is Kate Atkinson's breakout book - the most accomplished, most compulsively readable novel yet from a writer of the first rank.

CASE ONE:
Olivia Land, youngest and most beloved of the Land girls, goes missing in the night and is never seen again. Thirty years later, two of her surviving sisters, each achingly lonely in her own way, reunite when their cruel and distant father dies. There, among the clutter of their childhood home, they unearth a shocking clue to Olivia's disappearance.

CASE TWO:
All of Theo's happiness is tied to his devoted daughter Laura. He delights in her wit, her effortless beauty, her selfless love, and in the fact that she's taken a position at his prestigious law firm. But on her first day on the job, a maniac storms into the office and turns Theo's entire world upside down.

CASE THREE
Michelle looks around one day and finds herself trapped in a hell of her own making. A very needy baby and a very demanding husband make her every waking moment a reminder that somewhere, somehow, she made a grave mistake and will spend the rest of her life paying for it-until a fit of rage creates a grisly, bloody escape.

As Private Detective Jackson Brodie investigates all three cases, startling connections and discoveries emerge. Jackson finds himself inextricably caught up in his clients' lives; their grief, their joy, their desire, and their unshakable need for resolution are very much like his own.

Kate Atkinson's celebrated talent makes for a novel that positively sparkles with surprise, comedy, tragedy, and constant, page-turning delight.

Discussion Guide

1. It's quite 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?

2. 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?

3. 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 and Rosemary's, or does she only manage it more poorly?

4. 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?

5. 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?

6. Amelia can't bring herself to tell Julia about the night she caught Victor molesting Sylvia. How might sharing this knowledge change their pursuit of Olivia? How might it change their relationship?

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. In many ways **Case Histories** follows the rules of the mystery genre, but it also subverts them. How does the novel differ from other mysteries you've read? How would you classify it: mystery or family drama? Why?

9. Case Histories deftly weaves three plot lines into one narrative. Which of the three, if any, do you think could have been its own novel? Which characters would you like to know more about? Why?

10. Jackson Brodie will return in Kate Atkinson's next novel. Can you predict how his life might have changed after the events of **Case Histories**? What would you like to see him doing? With whom?

Author Bio

Kate Atkinson won the Whitbread (now Costa) Book of the Year prize with her first novel, BEHND THE SCENES AT THE MUSEUM. Her 2013 novel set around the Second World War, LIFE AFTER LIFE, was shortlisted for the Women?s Prize for Fiction and voted Book of the Year by independent booksellers? associations on both sides of the Atlantic. It also won the Costa Novel Award, as did her subsequent companion novel, A GOD IN RUINS (2015), and was adapted into a critically acclaimed television series in 2022. Her bestselling novels featuring former detective Jackson Brodie became the BBC television series ?Case Histories,? starring Jason Isaacs. She lives in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Critical Praise

"Delightful...strange, funny, and absolutely right."

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