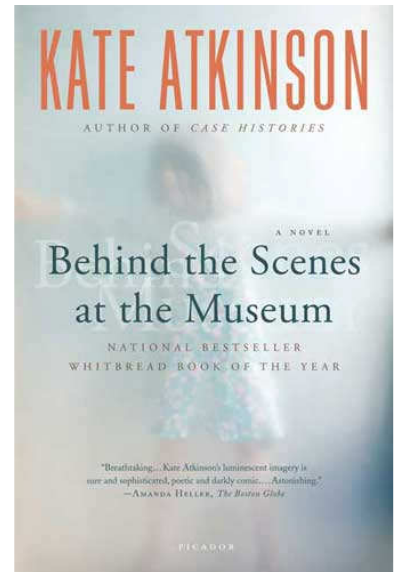


# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*

*By Kate Atkinson*

**ISBN: 0-312-15060-1**



### Discussion Questions:

1. What do cupboards have to do with the story?
2. More than one reviewer compared *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* to *Tristram Shandy* and to the works of Marcel Proust and Charles Dickens. What might these novels have in common? How does Kate Atkinson update or expand upon the earlier books' use of narration and history?
3. One of Atkinson's innovations is her use of footnotes. Why do you think she adopted this non-fiction technique in a novel?
4. Although this novel is very much about a specific time and place, it has been embraced by audiences in twelve countries, in as many languages. What gives *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* such a universal appeal?
5. What is the meaning of the book's title?
6. What other fictional narrators does Ruby Lennox bring to mind?

7. What does *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* say about women's roles and opportunities in the family and in the world at large?

What do the four generations of women in Ruby's family have in common?

8. *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* generated controversy in England when a critic called it "anti-family." How would you defend the book against this charge? What other novels, now considered classics, might have had to face this sort of accusation?

## **Kate Atkinson, in Her Own Words:**

### **How would you summarize *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*?**

"Almost impossible to do (it has a very complex structure). It's the story of Ruby Lennox from birth to the age of 40, her family, and the secrets hidden in the family's story. It also contains flashbacks to other members of the family -- in the past -- and so builds up a story/family tree that spans four generations. It's about history, time, loss, coincidence, self-knowledge. (It's also about cupboards -- but no one seems to notice that!)"

### **What was the inspiration for your book?**

"A photograph of my great-grandmother. The silver teaspoon (an event that really happened)."

### **Who are your favorite authors? What authors have most influenced your work?**

"Anne Tyler, Jane Austen, Kurt Vonnegut, Alice Hoffman, Margaret Atwood, Henry James, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Most influential -- Jane Austen and Kurt Vonnegut."

### **What did you do before your novel was published?**

"University tutor, legal secretary, welfare benefits administrator, home help, creative literature tutor,

supervising home visit service to the homebound and elderly, chambermaid, community education tutor -- anything and everything!"

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