

## ***Started Early, Took My Dog***

### **Reading Group topics**

1. 'For want of a nail the shoe was lost/For want of a shoe the horse was lost...' How do you think this traditional proverb, quoted by Kate Atkinson before the start of the novel, relates to what happens in *Started Early, Took My Dog*?
2. Another epigraph quotes Peter Sutcliffe, suggesting that this novel was partly inspired by the 1970s Yorkshire Ripper. Are there any other true crime cases that come to mind that resonate with the stories in this book?
3. A reviewer called this a 'state of the nation novel – far sharper and more observant and satirically understanding than anything else out there at the moment'. Do you agree, and if so, what did the novel reveal for you about Britain today?
4. This is the fourth Jackson Brodie novel. What do you think are the qualities that make this former police detective so attractive to readers? And would you want to see him reappear in another novel after this?
5. Another reviewer called Kate Atkinson 'possibly the only author writing crime fiction that is also literary fiction alive today'. What are the elements that turns *Started Early, Took My Dog* into crime fiction, and what are its 'literary' features? And do you agree with the way fiction is commonly classified into these separate genres by the critics, and also in libraries and bookshops?
6. On an impulse, Tracy Waterhouse buys little Courtney for a wad of cash from a woman she assumes to be her mother, after witnessing her behaving abusively towards the child. What do you think of Tracy's motives, and do you think this kind of unusual transaction could ever be morally justified?

7. Kate Atkinson's novels have often featured lost or abandoned children. Discuss the role of the lost girls in *Started Early, Took My Dog* – Courtney and Hope McMaster. How do they relate to the other lost girls in Jackson's own life?
  
8. The title is taken from a poem by Emily Dickinson, a poet Jackson Brodie has recently discovered, and it ends with another Dickinson poem, 'Hope'. Why do you think Kate Atkinson decided to finish on this note?