

2024 UPDATE:

You may use AI to generate up to 50% of your syllabus, but you must identify which questions were generated by AI and which ones were created by you.

Your names

February 27, 2015

Day 1: *Atonement* (pages 1-39)

Focus Question: Why does McEwan portray his characters as he does, Briony fantastical and on the brink of childhood, Cecilia impatient and bored, etc? Why does he choose to have parts of the story told from varying viewpoints?

Warm-up Activity: Journaling about the title of the novel. “Atonement” is described as being “satisfaction or reparation for a wrong or injury; amends”. Supposing that we didn't already have any idea of the story's plot, what kind of tone would this give the novel? Why would this be chosen as the title?

Discussion Questions:

1. When did Briony's play transition from being something she was proud of and looked forward to into a burden that she was obligated to carry.
2. Why do Cecilia and Briony need to be so in control?
3. Why is the story based in the setting and time period it is? (English countryside, 1930's) What does this add or detract from the story?
4. Is there any symbolic significance in Uncle Clem's vase?
5. Why is Briony set apart from her family?
6. What does Briony mean when she thinks "the imagination itself is a source of secrets"?
7. How does Cecilia feel about her role as a woman?
8. What is the significance of the parallels between Briony's visions of the fountain scene and how we actually read the scene in the book (think about perspectives)?
9. How does Cecilia diving into the fountain represent a baptism? What would Foster have to say about this scene?
10. How will the relationship between Cecilia and Robbie change throughout the story?
11. Why does Cecilia often feel irritated when watching Robbie?
12. What kind of relationship do Cecilia and Briony have? What are the contrasts between the two, as they seem to be pretty opposite of each other?
13. How does imagery play a role in the tone of the story thus far?
14. How is education portrayed in the book so far? What does this show?
15. "Cecilia had carried up trays of tea to her mother's room—as spectacularly squalid as her own—thinking some intimate conversations might develop. However, Emily Tallis wanted to share only tiny frets about the household, or she lay back against the pillows, her expression unreadable in the gloom, emptying her cup in wan silence."
 - a. How does this interaction effect Cecilia and the way she relates to others?
14. To what extent does Briony wish she was older? And to what extent is she content with being young?
 2. To whom might Briony look up to?
 3. "The self-contained world she had drawn with clear and perfect lines had been defaced with the scribble of other minds, other needs; and time itself, so easily sectioned on paper into acts and scenes, was even now dribbling uncontrollably away."
 - a. Why does Briony need control over her world? How do our actions reflect a need for control in our lives?

Closing Activity: Look at the website www.postsecret.com (ask Leclair to override filter). Which Postsecrets seem to be atoning for something? What does our society atone for? Use the index cards Chase brought to class to create a Postsecret for one of the characters in *Atonement*.

Journaling...

What has happened?

We've met Briony and Cecilia who had an "interesting encounter" with Robbie. Chase can't like a single character yet.

They seem stuck up and arrogant. Briony had quotes about her like

What happened in the fountain scene?

Cecilia is filling up a really important vase and Robby struggles with her to fill it up. Somehow the vase breaks and ends up in the fountain.

Cecilia and Robbie are probably going to get together at some point in the novel. "The Parents" are not really present. The cousins are children of Uncle Clem.

Briony sees the fountain scene from the window. She thinks something happened that didn't really happen. Will this be foreshadowing?

What would Foster have to say about Cecilia diving in the fountain?

She jumps into the fountain almost to punish Robbie. It seems like none of the vase/fountain scene is necessary in actual life so it needs to be symbolic.

What's the deal with Cecilia and Robbie?

They seem like they used to be really close, but argue a lot. What has happened to their relationship?

What's the deal with Cecilia and Briony?

Cecilia uses Briony as an excuse to live at home, but they don't really seem to interact. Cecilia feels like a mother to Briony. Briony wants independence and the attention.

It's interesting that Briony's room is in perfect order. Briony wants to control her surroundings. Maybe Cecilia's messy room reflects her emotional state.

These people don't seem to have very close relationships. They know each other, but don't really seem to have a deep connection.

Why is Briony so excited to have Leon come home?

It seems to be a really close relationship. Leon is 25. Cecilia is 23. Briony is 13.

Who is Paul Marshall? Is he an eligible bachelor or is he old? He has a kid. He has some sort of business like nutritional bars or something. He is accused of being a war monger.

Wrap-up: Chase: Paul Marshall's hair is weirdly described. Why

Alison: Leon seems to be the only person that brings Cecilia to life. Similar to Briony.

Zoey: "I don't have anything to say"

Success: We successfully figured out the complex Tallis family tree.

Struggle: Half of group out of commission.