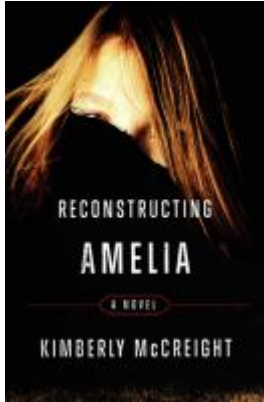


Oliver Wolcott Library
Reconstructing Amelia by Kimberly McCreight
Book Discussion Guide
Prepared by Patricia Moore



About the Book:

Litigation lawyer and harried single mother Kate Baron is stunned when her daughter's exclusive private school in Park Slope, Brooklyn, calls with disturbing information: her intelligent, high-achieving fifteen-year-old daughter, Amelia, has been caught cheating.

Kate can't believe that Amelia, an ambitious, levelheaded girl who loved school and has never been in trouble, would risk college and her future with a suspension. But when Kate arrives at St. Grace's she's unprepared for far more devastating news. Amelia is dead. Seemingly unable to cope with what she'd done, a despondent Amelia jumped from the school's roof in an act of "spontaneous" suicide.

At least that's the story St. Grace and the police tell Kate. Overwhelmed by her own guilt and shattered by grief, it is the story Kate believes . . . until she gets the anonymous text. She didn't jump. Now, Kate is going to find the truth about her daughter, no matter where it leads or what it takes.

Sifting through Amelia's emails, text messages, social media postings, and cell phone logs, Kate will begin to reconstruct the pieces of Amelia's life, and the people in it, to uncover why she was on St. Grace's roof that day-and why she died. Told in alternating voices, *Reconstructing Amelia* is a story of secrets and lies, of love and betrayal, of trusted friends and vicious enemies-of how much a parent really knows a child and how far a mother will go to vindicate the memory of a daughter whose life she could not save.

Source: HarperCollins.com (USA)

About the Author:

Kimberly McCreight, 39, attended Vassar College and the University of Pennsylvania Law School from which she graduated cum laude. Her fiction and freelance writing has appeared in publications including the *Antietam Review*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Babble* and *New York Magazine* online, among others. She has lived in Park Slope, Brooklyn with her husband and two young daughters for the past seven years.

Source: ReadingGroupGuides.com

Book Reviews:

"The real story of Amelia's life and death emerges slowly, through a creative blend of Kate's present, Amelia's past, and such varied communication methods as texts, e-mails, blog entries, and Facebook status updates. . . . McCreight portrays the darkness of adolescence, complete with doomed love, bullies, poisonous friendship, and insecurity. Fans of literary thrillers will enjoy the novel's dark mood and clever form." — *Publishers Weekly*

"Like *Gone Girl*, *Reconstructing Amelia* seamlessly marries a crime story with a relationship drama. And like *Gone Girl*, it should be hailed as one of the best books of the year...A (rating)" — *Entertainment Weekly*

"An elaborately plotted mystery. . . . A harrowing story. . . . McCreight does a fine job of building suspense and creating characters, notably Kate and Amelia, whom the target audience—both adults and older teens—will care about and empathize with." — *Booklist*

"In this heart-wrenching story of secrets and betrayal, Amelia's mother, Kate, is taken places no parent should ever have to go as she tries to piece together the truth about her daughter's tragic death. McCreight captures the complexities, cruelty and angst of teenage girls so well my stomach was in knots. What really happened to Amelia? You'll find yourself staying up all night to find out." — *Jennifer McMahon, author of The One I Left Behind*

Discussion Questions:

1. What is Amelia's relationship like with her mother? Why doesn't she share more with Kate? Why are adolescents often so reluctant to talk to their parents about the events in their lives—especially problems they are having with friends?
2. Describe Amelia. Is she a typical teenager? Talk about her friendship with Sylvia. What drew the girls together? What about her relationships with Zadie and Dylan? What made her feel so close to her Internet friend, Ben?
3. Might Amelia's situation have been different if she'd had a larger family around her? What if that family had been larger, but more filled with conflict?
4. Is Kate a good mother? She believes she knows her daughter well, but does she? What does she discover about Amelia that surprises her? What does she discover that confirms her deepest beliefs about Amelia and their relationship?
5. What kind of a support network does Kate have to rely on? Does she bear any blame for the events that occur? Is there any way she could have prevented the tragedy? What about Grace Hall—how much, if any, responsibility does the school bear for Amelia's death? Who can you turn to for help in handling a problem involving your child?
6. Why is being popular so important in adolescence? Has the Internet and social networking added to the pressures teenagers must cope with?
7. What impact does class play in the story? What about sexuality—Amelia's recognition of her own desires? What about Amelia's need to be perfect—her drive to be a good student?

8. Why does such a smart girl like Amelia fall into the trap of the secret clubs? Why isn't she more suspicious of the Magpies and the boys around them? How did her keeping the secret about the Maggies impact her relationship with Sylvia? Why are some children cruel to others? Did your school have a hierarchy or clubs like the Magpies? Where did you fit it?

9. If you have a child, how much do you know about his or her life? How far should parents go to monitor their child's life? Do children have a right to privacy the way adults do? What might someone learn if they tried to "reconstruct" you from your emails, correspondence, texts, tweets, messages, blog posts, and Facebook updates? Does social media make us too connected? What is your opinion of social media—do you think it's a positive development or an erosion of who we are and how we interact?

10. How does the author ratchet up the suspense in the story? What clues does she provide to point you toward the truth—or away from it?

11. Bullying is a major topic across the media and throughout society. Do you believe it is a serious issue, or do you think it's a phase that all children go through? How has the rise of the Internet contributed to the severity of bullying and to our awareness of it? Can we decrease the incidents of bullying? How do we learn to stand up to mean people?

12. Does Kate get closure when she discovers the truth? Where do you think she will go from here?

13. What inspired you or your group to choose *Reconstructing Amelia*? Did it meet your expectations? Is it an accurate representation of modern parenting and growing up in twenty-first century America? What did you take away from reading the book?

Source: ReadingGroupGuides.com

Further Reading:

Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn

On a warm summer morning in North Carthage, Missouri, it is Nick and Amy Dunne's fifth wedding anniversary. Presents are being wrapped and reservations are being made when Nick's clever and beautiful wife disappears from their rented McMansion on the Mississippi River. Husband-of-the-Year Nick isn't doing himself any favors with cringe-worthy daydreams about the slope and shape of his wife's head, but passages from Amy's diary reveal the alpha-girl perfectionist could have put anyone dangerously on edge. Under mounting pressure from the police and the media—as well as Amy's fiercely doting parents—the town golden boy parades an endless series of lies, deceits, and inappropriate behavior. Nick is oddly evasive, and he's definitely bitter—but is he really a killer?

Moonlight Mile by Dennis Lehane

Amanda McCready was four years old when she vanished from a Boston neighborhood twelve years ago. Desperate pleas for help from the child's aunt led investigators Kenzie and Gennaro to take on the case. The pair risked everything to find the young girl—only to orchestrate her return to a neglectful mother and a broken home. Now Amanda is sixteen—and gone again. A stellar student, brilliant but aloof, she seemed destined to escape her upbringing. Yet Amanda's aunt is once more knocking on Patrick Kenzie's door, fearing the worst for the little girl who has blossomed into a striking, clever young woman—a woman who hasn't been seen in weeks. Haunted by their consciences, Kenzie and Gennaro revisit the case that troubled them the most.

The Most Dangerous Thing by Laura Lippman

With *The Most Dangerous Thing*, the multiple award winning author—recipient of the Anthony, Edgar®, Shamus, and Agatha Awards, to name but a few—once again demonstrates how storytelling is done to perfection. Set once again in the well-wrought environs of Lippman’s beloved Baltimore, it is the shadowy tale of a group of onetime friends forced to confront a dark past they’ve each tried to bury following the death of one of their number. Rich in the compassion and insight into flawed human nature that has become a Lippman trademark while telling an absolutely gripping story, *The Most Dangerous Thing* will not be confined by genre restrictions, reaching out instead to captive a wide, diverse audience, from Harlan Coben and Kate Atkinson fans to readers of Jodi Picoult and Kathryn Stockett.

Red Leaves by Thomas H. Cook

Eric Moore has a prosperous business, a comfortable home, a stable family life in a quiet town. Then, on an ordinary night, his teenage son Keith babysits Amy Giordano, the eight-year-old daughter of a neighboring family. The next morning Amy is missing, and Eric isn't sure his son is innocent. In his desperate attempt to hold his family together by proving his-and the community's-suspicions wrong, Eric finds himself in a vortex of doubt and broken trust.

We Need to Talk About Kevin by Lionel Shriver

That neither nature nor nurture bears exclusive responsibility for a child's character is self-evident. But such generalizations provide cold comfort when it's your own son who's just opened fire on his fellow students and whose class photograph—with its unseemly grin—is blown up on the national news. The question of who's to blame for teenage atrocity tortures our narrator, Eva Khatchadourian. Two years ago, her son, Kevin, murdered seven of his fellow high-school students, a cafeteria worker, and a popular algebra teacher. Fearing that her own shortcomings may have shaped what her son has become, she confesses to a deep, long-standing ambivalence about both motherhood in general and Kevin in particular. How much is her fault?

When Will There Be Good News?: A Novel by Kate Atkinson

On a hot summer day, Joanna Mason's family slowly wanders home along a country lane. A moment later, Joanna's life is changed forever...

On a dark night thirty years later, ex-detective Jackson Brodie finds himself on a train that is both crowded and late. Lost in his thoughts, he suddenly hears a shocking sound...

At the end of a long day, 16-year-old Reggie is looking forward to watching a little TV. Then a terrifying noise shatters her peaceful evening. Luckily, Reggie makes it a point to be prepared for an emergency... These three lives come together in unexpected and deeply thrilling ways in the latest novel from Kate Atkinson, the critically acclaimed author who Harlan Coben calls "an absolute must-read."