

The Man
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2014

Reader's Guide



Other novels by Karen Joy Fowler

Sarah Canary (1991)

The Sweetheart Season (1996)

Black Glass (1998)

Sister Noon (2001)

The Jane Austen Book Club (2004)

Wit's End (2008)

What I Didn't See and Other Stories (2010)

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves Karen Joy Fowler

Serpent's Tail

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About the author

Karen Joy Fowler is the author of six novels and three short story collections. *The Jane Austen Book Club* spent thirteen weeks on the New York Times bestsellers list and was a *New York Times* Notable Book. *Sarah Canary* won the Commonwealth medal for best first novel by a Californian, and was listed for the *Irish Times* International Fiction Prize as well as the Bay Area Book Reviewers Prize.

Fowler and her husband, who have two grown children and five grandchildren, live in Santa Cruz, California.

She is the co-founder of the James Tiptree, Jr. Award and the current president of the Clarion Foundation (also known as Clarion San Diego).

We Are All Completely Besides Ourselves

As a child, Rosemary used to talk all the time. So much so that her parents used to tell her to start in the middle if she wanted to tell a story. Now Rosemary has just started college and she barely talks at all. And she definitely doesn't talk about her family. So we're not going to tell you too much either: you'll have to find out for yourself what it is that makes her unhappy family unlike any other. Rosemary is now an only child, but she used to have a sister the same age as her, and an older brother. Both are now gone - vanished from her life. But there's something unique about Rosemary's sister, Fern. So now she's telling her story; a looping narrative that begins towards the end, and then goes back to the beginning. Twice.

Discussion points

Early on in *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, Rosemary Cooke tells the reader that she will start her story in the middle. Why is it important for her to skip the beginning?

Many readers will know before starting the book that Fern is a chimpanzee. Some people say this adds to the reading experience, others wished that hadn't known. For you, does knowing a plot spoil or enhance a story?

How did being co-raised with a chimpanzee impact Rosemary's development? In what ways is she different from 'normal' children?

Are Rosemary's mother and father good parents? Should they have dealt with Fern's leaving differently?

By the end of *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* do you think Rosemary is reconciled with her family history?

Themed reading

James Lever *Me Cheeta*
Benjamin Hale *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore*
Virginia Morell *Animal Wise*

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