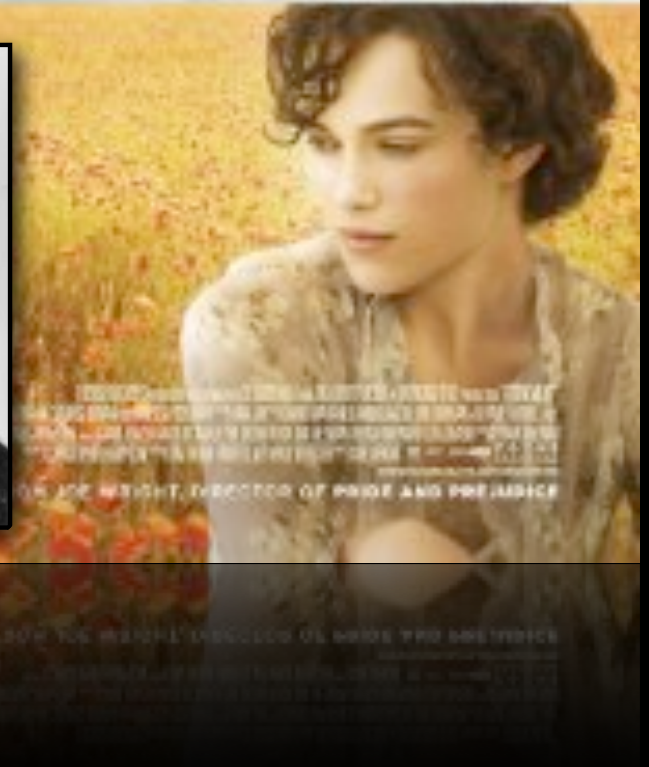
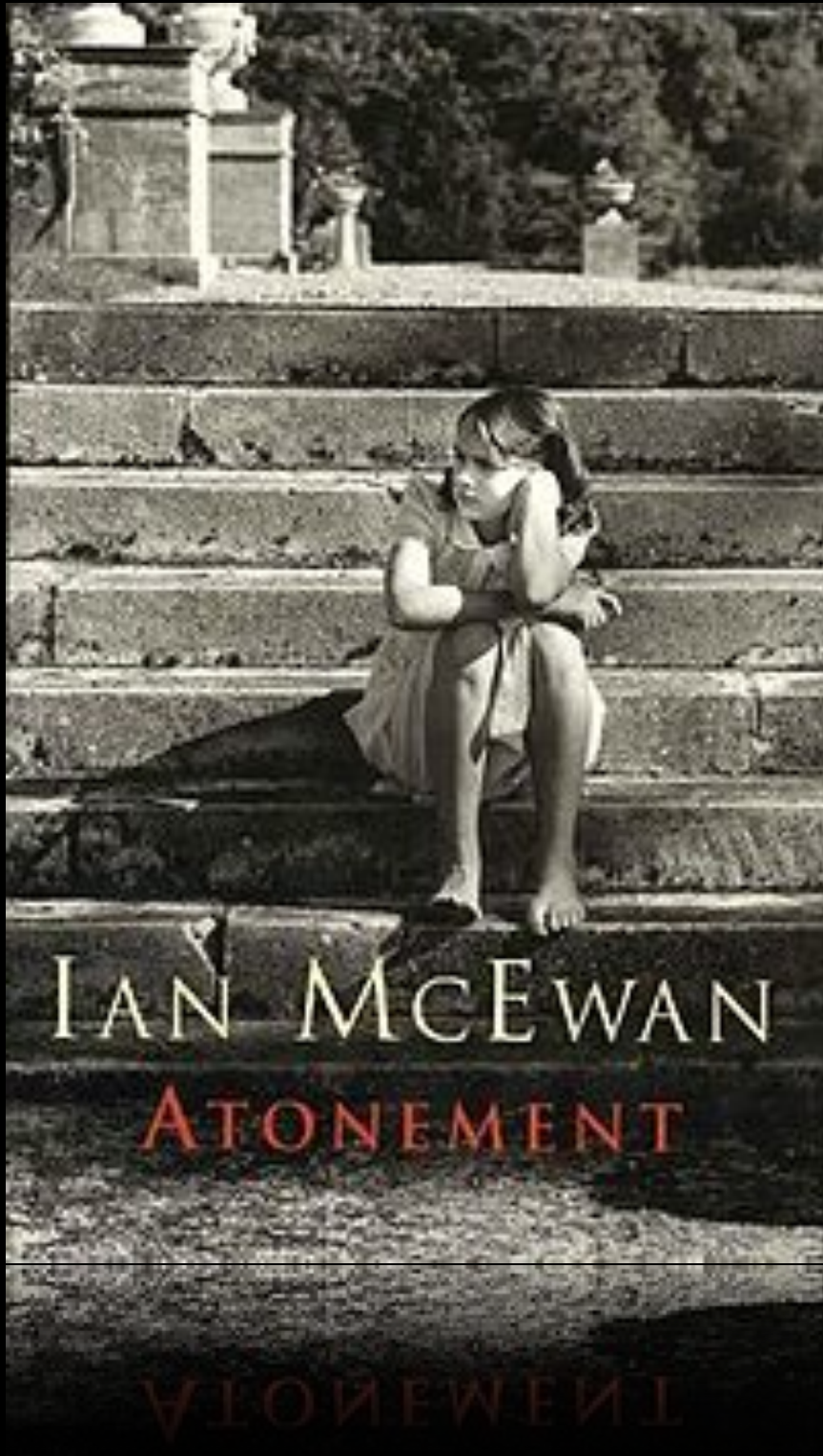


A t o n e m e n t



# Preliminary Exercises

## Chapter One

- Perform a close reading of the last paragraph on p. 5, and connect it with the epigram from *Northanger Abbey*. What is revealed?
- Discriminating readers will note a hidden reference to Aristotle on p. 8 (top). What might be the significance of this?
- Find some words and phrases used in reference to the Quincey family that suggest dysfunction.
- Analyze the conflict between Briony and Lola over the play. From whence does it arise, and how is it resolved?
- Let's fill in the gaps! Come up with several words to describe Briony as she is presented in Chapter I. Find direct evidence in the text to support each word.





# Part One



- How does McEwen develop Briony's character in the early chapters? Make a list of critical incidents involving her and suggest what they reveal about her.
- Discuss the tension between Robbie and Cecelia. What dynamics are at work below the surface of their attitudes and actions regarding each other?
- Analyze Paul Marshall, Lola, & Emily Tallis. How do they each represent the times?
- How can you tell that *Atonement* is a postmodern work?
- Consider the many literary references: Austen, Aristotle, Richardson & Fielding, Eliot, Shakespeare, Freud, etc. What is the significance of each, and, taken together, what do they mean?
- Chart Briony's actions from the time she reads Robbie's letter. Given all we have learned, by the end of Part One, has your assessment of her changed?
- How do the shifts in POV help to develop the narrative? Or, is there one narrator?

# A t o n e m e n t

# Parts Two & Three



- How have the five years between Parts One & Two changed Robbie? Why, if he is innocent, does he seem to feel so much guilt?
- What has happened to the Tallis home and family between 1935 and 1940? How do these changes affect our understanding of the unfolding themes in the novel?
- How is Briony dealing with her own guilt? Note details in the text.
- Compare and contrast the war theme here with *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Remains of the Day*.
- TS Eliot of *Criterion* rejected Robbie's poem earlier; here, Cyril Connolly ("CC") of *Horizon* rejects Briony's story. How might his letter to her suggest larger ideas in the novel?
- Carefully review two pivotal scenes: The wedding of Paul & Lola, and the confrontation between Briony and Robbie at Cecelia's flat. What do we learn from these episodes?
- Assess the message of the novel at the end of Part Three.

# A t o n e m e n t



# London, 1999



- Why can't Briony publish her work in her lifetime? What turns out to be the process by which the final version is finally produced?
- What really happened? Suggest a timeline of what may have actually occurred.
- Consider how the following possible themes are played out in the novel: truth, memory, love, loss, war, imagination, guilt, and atonement. Are there others?
- What, according to Briony, is the novelist's job? Do you agree? What is the role of the novel in our society today, if any? Do you think *Atonement* lives up to its own standard?
- (Optional) Assess the movie version...how does the director capture the novel's unique narrative approach? Is there anything the movie didn't quite get right?

A t o n e m e n t

