

Our first unit will be relatively brief and will presume a thorough prior reading of the novel on your part. We'll devote six classes to *Atonement*, which amounts to sixty-page chunks. Your written responses will be submitted for a minor grade at the *start* of the unit. The major grade will be an open-book, in-class assignment in two parts: preparation and presentation (yes, there will be options).

Part One – Chapter 1 (Please do Question 4 & two others of your choosing)

1. Perform a close reading of the last paragraph on p. 5, and connect it with the epigram from *Northanger Abbey*. What is revealed?
2. Discriminating readers will note a hidden reference to Aristotle on p. 8 (top). What might be the significance of this?
3. Find some words and phrases used in reference to the Quincey family that suggest dysfunction.
4. Analyze the conflict between Briony and Lola over the play. From whence does it arise, and how is it resolved?
5. Let's fill in the gaps! Come up with several words to describe Briony as she is presented in Chapter 1. Find direct evidence in the text to support each word.

Part One (Please do Questions 1, 2, & one other of your choosing)

1. How does McEwan develop Briony's character in the early chapters? Make a list of critical incidents involving her and suggest what they reveal about her.
2. Discuss the tension between Robbie and Cecelia. What dynamics are at work below the surface of their attitudes and actions regarding each other?
3. Analyze Paul Marshall, Lola, & Emily Tallis. How do they each represent the times?
4. How can you tell *Atonement* is a postmodern work?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. How do the shifts in POV help to develop the narrative? Or is there one narrator?

Parts Two & Three (Please do Questions 3, 5, & one other of your choosing)

1. How have the five years between Parts One & Two changed Robbie? Why, if he is innocent, does he seem to feel so much guilt?
2. 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?
3. How is Briony dealing with her own guilt? Note details in the text.
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. Assess the message of the novel at the end of Part Three.

London, 1999 (Please do Questions 2, 3, & 4)

1. 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?
2. What really happened? Suggest a timeline of what may have actually occurred.
3. Consider how the following possible themes are played out in the novel: truth, memory, love, loss, war, imagination, guilt, and atonement. Are there others?
4. 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?
5. Assess the movie version if you have watched it. How does the director capture the novel's unique narrative approach? Is there anything the movie didn't quite get right?