

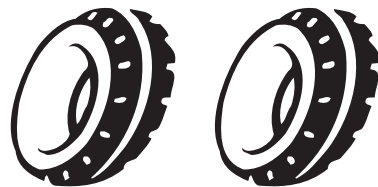
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine

by Gail Honeyman

BOOK GROUP

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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Gail was born and raised in Stirling, Scotland. Her mother was as a civil servant and her father a scientist. Gail was an avid reader in her childhood, visiting the library “a ridiculous number of times a week” due to her passion for books.

She studied French language and literature at the Glasgow University and continued her education at the University of Oxford, starting a postgraduate course in French poetry. However, Gail realised that an academic career was not for her and she started a string of “backroom jobs”. She worked at first as a civil servant in economic development and then as an administrator at Glasgow University.

While working at Glasgow University, Gail enrolled in a Faber Academy writing course, writing the first three chapters of what would become *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*. Cambridge’s Lucy Cavendish College was running a competition for unpublished fiction by female writers and it was just what she was looking for to fulfill her lifelong passion for reading, so she submitted her work and the rest is history. The novel was published in 2017 and earned numerous awards, sold millions of copies, and received wide critical acclaim.

Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine won the 2017 Costa First Novel Award. When asked how much of Eleanor Oliphant was based on her own life, Gail has said “Eleanor Oliphant isn’t me, or anyone I know — but of course I’ve felt loneliness — everybody does.” In 2018 Gail revealed that she was working on a new novel which will be “set in a different period and location.”

BOOK SUMMARY

Meet Eleanor Oliphant: she struggles with appropriate social skills and tends to say exactly what she’s thinking. Nothing is missing in her carefully timetabled life of avoiding unnecessary human contact, where weekends are punctuated by frozen pizza, vodka, and phone chats with Mummy.

But everything changes when Eleanor meets Raymond, the bumbling and deeply unhygienic IT guy from her office. When she and Raymond together save Sammy, an elderly gentleman who has fallen, the three rescue one another from the lives of isolation that they had been living. Ultimately, it is Raymond’s big heart that will help Eleanor find the way to repair her own profoundly damaged one. If she does, she’ll learn that she, too, is capable of finding friendship—and even love—after all.

Smart, warm, uplifting, *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* is the story of an out-of-the-ordinary heroine whose deadpan weirdness and unconscious wit make for an irresistible journey as she realizes... the only way to survive is to open your heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. The book starts off with descriptions of Eleanor's job. Eleanor had been working at her job since she was 21. She said that the owner felt sorry for her and gave her the job because she had a black eye and a broken arm in a sling. What impressions did you have of Eleanor? What did you think this book was going to be about? Why do you think the author included this at the beginning?
2. Eleanor is academically smart having a degree in Classics but her colleagues refer to her such as "wacko jacko" or "harry potter". Does the way Eleanor look and how she behaves socially call for such name calling? Do you have 'nick names' for your colleagues?
3. As we get into the book we discover that Eleanor has been in foster care and children's homes as a child. Do you think that her social awkwardness and solitary lifestyle is a result of this type of upbringing? Or do you think that it's her Mummy that has made her like that?
4. Why does Eleanor lead a regimented and lonely life?
5. Which character did you like the most? Why?
6. Eleanor and Raymond's friendship grow as a result of them helping Sammy Thom when he fell and banged his head. Why was Eleanor reluctant to help Sammy right away?
7. Eleanor talks with Mummy every Wednesday. What is her relationship with her Mummy like? Why does Eleanor want to talk to her?
8. Eleanor and Raymond's act of kindness in helping Sammy changed all three of their lives. Do you think their lives changed for the better? Do you believe in karma?
9. What your impression of Raymond? Did you like him? Why?
10. Eleanor develops a crush on Johnnie Lomond a singer she sees performing. She starts on a path to transform her the way she looks. She was fine with the way she looked before but rationally argued that if she was to be a singer's girlfriend she would have to look socially acceptable. Why does she think he's 'husband material'? What qualities in a man is she looking for? Have you done something like that when you had a crush?
11. The book covers many themes, friendship, kindness, isolation, loneliness, grief, mental health, depression to name a few. Which theme/s spoke to you? Which theme made an impact the most?
12. "*When the silence and the aloneness press down and around me, crushing me, carving through me like ice, I need to speak aloud sometimes, if only for proof of life.*" Eleanor talks to her plant Polly, what does this say about her and her state of mind? How does she change towards the end?
13. Eleanor often mentions others lack of social skills or communications skills. Do you think that Eleanor blames others for their faults as a defense mechanism? What is the rationing behind her thoughts? Do you think she acts in a logical manner?

14. When does Eleanor change and become hopeful? What signs do you see that show her new outlook?
15. Did you find the book funny? Which part made you laugh?
16. What did you think of the ending? Did you enjoy it? Which part did you like?
17. After reading *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, who would you recommend it to?

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