

Reading Group Guide

Girl Reading by Katie Ward

About the book

Seven portraits. Seven artists. Seven girls and women reading.

A young orphan poses nervously for a Renaissance maestro in medieval Siena, and an artist's servant girl in 17th-century Amsterdam snatches a moment away from her work to lose herself in tales of knights and battles. A young woman reading in a Shoreditch bar catches the eye of a young man who takes her picture, and a Victorian medium holds a book that she barely acknowledges while she waits for the exposure.



Each chapter of this richly textured debut takes us into a perfectly imagined tale of how each portrait came to be, and as the connections accumulate, the narrative leads us into the present and beyond - an inspired celebration of women reading and the artists who have caught them in the act.

About the author

Katie Ward was born in Somerset in 1979. She has worked in the public and voluntary sectors, including at a women's refuge and for a Member of Parliament. She took a career break in order to write her debut novel, after coming across an article about a book of portraits of women and girls reading. Katie lives in Suffolk with her husband and two cats.

Reading group discussion questions

1. Which characters stood out for you as strong representations of girls and women?
2. Which is your favourite chapter in this novel? How well would it work as a standalone story?
3. The author has chosen not to use speech marks in *Girl Reading*. How has the absence of speech marks affected your experience of this book?
4. What is the role of the artist's patron? Does the patron help, or hinder, the artist?
5. What happens to painting when photography is invented?
6. Is it necessary for readers of this novel to see the real portraits which inspired it?
7. One of the themes in *Girl Reading* is women's literacy. How important is literacy to various characters in this novel? Which character, or story, best represents this theme for you?
8. One of the themes in *Girl Reading* is women's bodies. How much control do various characters have over their own bodies? Which character, or story, best represents this theme for you?
9. Did you notice any parallels emerging between characters from different historical periods? How are they alike? How are they different? For example:
 - a. Simone Martini and Sincerity Yabuki
 - b. Esther and Jeannine Okoro
 - c. Angelica Kauffman and Cynthia Everard
10. What is the meaning of the Sibil in the final chapter of *Girl Reading*?