

BOOK CLUB GUIDE

Something Like Breathing

Friendship blossoms between an enigmatic loner of a girl and a whisky distiller's granddaughter on a remote Scottish island

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A note from the author:

Something like Breathing is about friendship, how we make friends, what friendship means and the difficulties in finding it. It's about the differences between people, and the things they share. It is shy girls and confident girls, it is wives and women who daydream about being elsewhere. It is about wishing to fit in and the things that make us unique. And somehow, however life fails to match the things we longed for, finding a way to get through. Some people make whiskey, some sell kitchen gadgets, some make dresses from patterns in Vogue, others kiss people no matter what other people say.

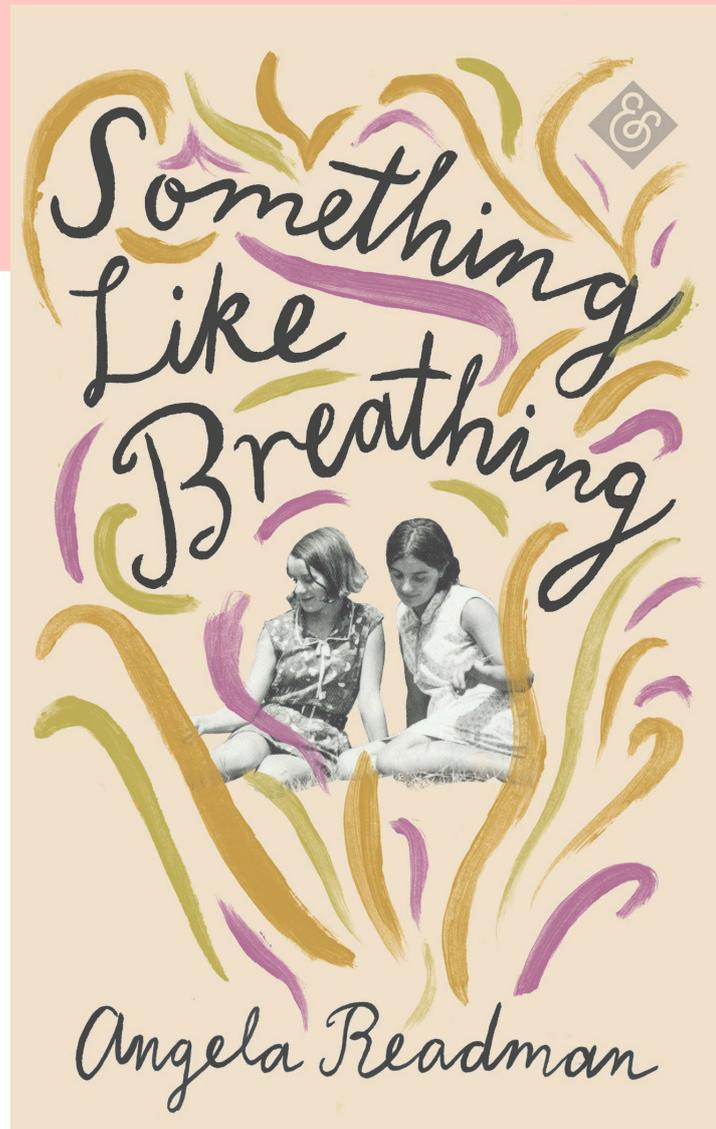
This novel touches on several themes. Gender, sexuality, slut shaming, the way girls are socialised differently to boys. Though the novel is set in the 50s, I hope people will still find it relevant. These are all issues we are still grappling with and struggling to change. Even now, a discussion is being had by women all around the world. Every day of our lives, we hear words about what women should or shouldn't wear, how to act, how we should live and who we should love. Hopefully, I wrote something that contributes to that discussion in a small way. Reading this book, is an experience I hope people will enjoy, I hope they will fall in love with the strange characters and the windy wilds of the island. I'd love to think the book makes a reader want to curl up, eat a caramel wafer and find another world for a few hours. I also hope when they reach the end, it allows people to reflect on what has, and hasn't changed.

If I hadn't written it, it's probably a book I'd talk to about with a girlfriend over a cuppa. Relationships are always important in fiction, but I don't read about the friendship's women have as often as I'd like. I wanted to take the subject as seriously as any other type of relationship and acknowledge how important girlfriends are in our lives. I'd like to imagine someone out there finishing the novel and calling a friend. That perhaps, it lets people share stories about friendships they may have had, and what they have meant at certain times in their lives. The highs and the lows, the disappointments and the joys, the friends that made us laugh, made us cry, but played a part in our lives growing up.

I didn't write the book with a message, though something like one comes through in whatever we write. If there is one in *Something like Breathing* it is something like: Be yourself, even if you're shy, even if you struggle, even if getting there may have been painful and you feel like a freak, to hell with everyone else and what people say; be true to doing what is right for you. Just get there, even if you don't know where there is. Just breathe.

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. The whiskey distillery features prominently in the novel and in how Lorrie evaluates others. How does this reveal her perspective of the world?
2. The 1950s was a time of more restrictive gender roles. How do certain characters challenge or adhere to these roles?
3. In the more sexually reserved 1950s the source of Sylvie's abilities is almost as taboo as the ability itself. Do you think Bunny's reaction to Sylvie's ability would be different if there was an alternative source or if the novel was set in the present day?
4. It later becomes clear that the daily 'gift' of a dead owl comes from Lorrie's estranged great-cousin. What might they symbolize?
5. Does the novel paint an accurate portrait of depression?
6. Once Bunny's true motives behind Sylvie's visits to her grandmother come to light, how does this affect our understanding of Sylvie's mistrust of others, particularly Joe Clark?
7. Does the knowledge of Joe Clark's previous interaction with Sylvie and her abilities cause you to question his romantic feelings for her?



8. Discuss the role that loneliness plays in the novel.
9. When Sylvie finally decides to leave the island she writes, "I shouldn't be here. I can't be who everyone wants me to be. I can't change either. I don't even know if I want to." What parts of herself might she be referring to? Is she just referring to her abilities or is there more about who she is that she feels will never be accepted by the people on the island?