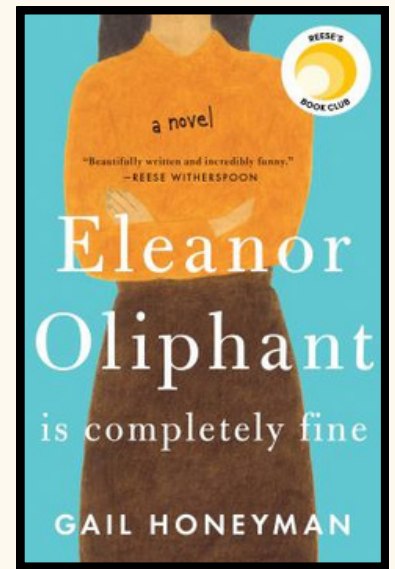




Characters

BOOK & BAKE

June 8, 2026



Eleanor Oliphant

- Finance clerk at a design firm called By Design
- 29 years old
- Grew up in foster care system
- Lives a solitary life; trauma induced social awkwardness



Raymond Gibbons

- I.T. position at By Design
- Frequent smoker
- Casual, wrinkled clothing
- Patient and kind



Johnnie Lomond

- Local musician
- Object of obsessive infatuation of Eleanor
- Unaware that he has become the target of Eleanor's extensive self-improvement and research project



Sharon Smyth (Mummy)

- Eleanor's mother
- Disturbed, cruel
- Speaks to Eleanor weekly on the phone
- Root of Eleanor's fragile self-image



Marianne

- Younger sister to Eleanor
- Eleanor's memories of her are fragmented
- Died in fire



Sammy Thom

- Elderly, retired mailman
- Friend to Raymond and Eleanor who helped him after a fall
- Introduces Eleanor to a positive, welcoming family dynamic that she has never experienced



Mrs. Gibbons

- Mother to Raymond
- Extends genuine hospitality to Eleanor
- Sharp contrast to Eleanor's maternal experience



Dr. Maria Temple

- Eleanor's therapist
- Sharp and patient listener





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Eleanor is an opinionated young woman who makes sweeping and often laugh-out-loud pronouncements on everything from duffle coats to bikini waxes. What were some favorite moments for you?

2. Eleanor develops several coping mechanisms to manage her loneliness. Can you relate? If so, how do you deal with loneliness in your life?

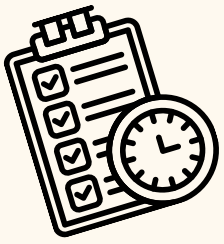


3. Knowing Eleanor as we do, what do you think was so special about Johnnie Lomond that motivated Eleanor to completely reinvent herself? What does this say about her?



4. Though Eleanor is never depicted as receiving any particular diagnosis, mental health clearly plays a key role in her character arc. Do you feel her behaviors were trauma induced or was she born this way?





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

5. Is the comedy of Eleanor's social mistakes kind, or does it risk making her pain seem lighter than it is?



6. There are vast differences between the family dynamics of Sammy and Raymonds' families versus Eleanor's family. In what ways do these differences reveal themselves to Eleanor and how does it impact her?



7. Eleanor is frightened that she may become like her mother. Is this a reasonable fear? What is the balance of nature and nurture?

8. What event triggers the "bad days"? What does Eleanor realize about herself and how does she respond?





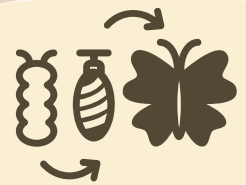
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

9. Is it possible to emerge from a traumatic childhood unscathed?



10. What do you feel makes Eleanor appealing to Raymond? (p. 303)

11. Eleanor's view of Raymond shifts dramatically by the end of the novel. What scenes/moments do you feel best capture the arc of Eleanor's evolving perspective on Raymond.



12. Marianne's name isn't mentioned until chapter 33 yet her presence hovers in Eleanor's repressed memories in earlier chapters. What causes Eleanor to remember who Marianne is and what happened to her?



●●●NOTABLE QUOTES TO PONDER

“There are scars on my heart, just as thick, as disfiguring as those on my face. I know they’re there. I hope some undamaged tissue remains, a patch though which love can come in and flow out.”

~Eleanor, p. 74

What does this comment say about Eleanor’s self-awareness?



“Twice in one day, to be the recipient of thanks and warm regard! I would never have suspected that small deeds could elicit such genuine, generous responses. I felt a little glow inside—not a blaze, more like a small, steady candle.”



~Eleanor, p. 97-98

What is Eleanor discovering? How did this make you feel when you read it?

“Did men ever look in the mirror, I wondered, and find themselves wanting in deeply fundamental ways? When they opened a newspaper or watched a film, were they presented with nothing but exceptionally handsome young men, and did this make them feel intimidated, inferior, because they were not as young, not as handsome?”

~Eleanor, p. 74

Eleanor's question is rhetorical and slightly tongue-in-cheek, but worth answering. What are your thoughts? If men don't have this experience, why not? If they do, why is it not more openly discussed?

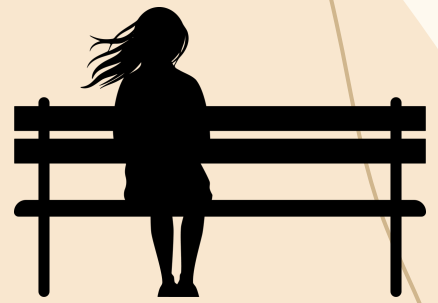


“If someone asks you how you are, you are meant to say FINE. You are not meant to say that you cried yourself to sleep last night because you hadn’t spoken to another person for two consecutive days.

FINE is what you say”

~Eleanor, p. 226-227

Why is this the case?



“These days, loneliness is the new cancer – a shameful, embarrassing thing, brought upon yourself in some obscure way. A fearful, incurable thing, so horrifying that you dare not mention it; other people don’t want to hear the word spoken aloud for fear that they might too be afflicted.

~Eleanor, p. 227

Your thoughts?

