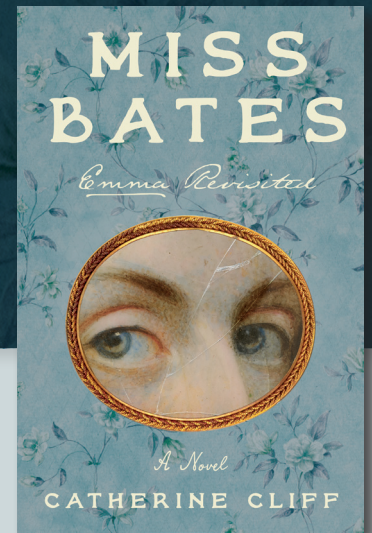


MISS BATES

Reading Group Guide



1. In the first chapter of *Miss Bates*, five-year-old Henrie recognizes that her natural reaction to the headless chicken is not acceptable. “Her face and stomach hurt with the effort of holding her mask of calm efficiency in place.” So begins her lifetime of masking. What are other occasions Miss Bates wears a mask throughout the book, and perhaps more importantly, when can she take it off?
2. Emma sees herself as the opposite of Miss Bates, both in Austen’s *Emma* and here in *Miss Bates*. In what ways are they opposites, and in what ways are they twinned? Does Emma wear any sort of a mask? What is the connection between power and authenticity?
3. In our idea of Regency England, social class is sharply defined. But what are instances in this book of people moving between classes, both up and down? And are there limits in either direction?
4. There are a number of characters who live outside the patriarchy’s protection in this book. Miss Twythorpe in the end was not able to survive in the space outside of the rules of conformity. Henrie survives by turning gratitude into a currency and a smile into a camouflage. How do other husbandless women in this book manage their room and board?
5. Near the beginning of the novel, Jenkins tells Henrie that witches are “small, like a sparrow, but it turns out [they] can make turrible things pass.” Toward the end, Henrie tells Albert that witches were people, usually poorer women, who could make themselves invisible but “that way they could get more done because no one knew they were there.” The topic of witches weaves in and out of the novel. Why? What are some characteristics of Henrie which might, in a different era, have fallen into the category of witch-like? Finally, is there power in being overlooked?
6. How does the prologue, which features Henrie being dropped off by the Eltons as they make their way home to the vicarage, and the epilogue, which has Henrie walking by that same vicarage, speak to Henrie’s journey throughout the course of the novel?
7. Is Henrie a villain? Is Emma?
8. What role do Henrie’s daydreams, which range from dreams of violence to fantasies about food to beloved memories, play in the novel?
9. In an assault, the auctioneer bites Henrie’s tongue and wonders aloud why women talk so much. In a less violent way, other characters also want Henrie to talk less, to bite her tongue. Is Henrie’s chatter an act of subversion or rebellion?