

This reading group guide for *Dear Mrs. Bird* includes discussion questions and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. “There’s nothing that can’t be sorted with common sense and a strong will” begins the description of Mrs. Bird’s column, Henrietta Helps. In theory, that’s not such a bad approach, but how does it fall short of addressing her readers’ concerns?
2. Why does the memory of her friend Kitty’s experience affect Emmy so strongly? How does it inform her actions?
3. Author AJ Pearce incorporates charmingly old-fashioned expressions to help convey a sense of the time period. What were some of your favourite terms? Did the language help your understanding of the era and the characters’ personalities?
4. Mr. Collins advises Emmy, “Find out what you’re good at . . . and then get even better. That’s the key”. Is this good advice for Emmy? Does she follow it?
5. Why does Emmy hesitate to tell Bunty about writing to Mrs. Bird’s readers? Is she only worried about Bunty’s disapproval or is it more than that? How do secrets affect their friendship throughout the novel?
6. Do you think Emmy was right to confront William after he rescued the two children? Was his reaction warranted? Why do you think they took such different views of the event?
7. One of the major themes of the novel is friendship. Discuss Emmy and Bunty’s relationship and all the ways they support and encourage each other over the course of the novel.
8. After the bombing at Café de Paris, Bunty is distraught and angry, but is some of her critique of Emmy fair? Does Emmy interfere too much?
9. Whether it’s readers writing in to Mrs. Bird, Charles writing to Emmy, or Emmy writing to Bunty, letters are of great importance throughout *Dear Mrs. Bird*. How does letter-writing shape the narrative?
10. The letter from Anxious strikes a chord with Emmy. She thinks, “How often did we say well done to our readers? How often did anyone ever tell women they were doing a good job? That they didn’t need to be made of steel all the time? That it was all right to feel a bit down?” How did the book make you think differently about women’s experiences in wartime?
11. Emmy’s mother says to her, “Once this silly business is all sorted, you and Bunty and all your friends will be able to get on and achieve whatever you want” (page 86). How much do you think expectations have changed for young women since World War II? What careers do you think Emmy and Bunty would aspire to if they were young now?
12. In the Author’s Note, AJ Pearce describes how reading advice columns in vintage magazines inspired her to write *Dear Mrs. Bird*. She says, “I found them thought-provoking,

moving, and inspirational, and my admiration for the women of that time never stops growing. . . . It is a privilege to look into their world and remember what incredible women and girls they all were". Discuss how magazines, then and now, provide a unique window into people's lives.

AJ's Playlist for *Dear Mrs Bird*

When *Dear Mrs Bird* was published I put together a playlist on Spotify. It's great for setting an atmosphere for your book group meeting so you may enjoy giving it a go. Just make sure you turn up the volume!

It's a Pair of Wings for Me	Nat Gonella and his New Georgians
Five O'Clock Whistle	Bette Roberts, Joe Loss and his Orchestra
In the Mood	Glenn Miller
We're Gonna Hang out The Washing on the Siegfried Line	Flanagan and Allen
(There'll be Blue Birds Over)The White Cliffs of Dover	Vera Lynn
A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square	Anne Shelton
Bless 'Em All (The Service Song)	George Formby
Wish Me Luck (As You Wave Me Goodbye)	Gracie Fields
Take the 'A' Train	Duke Ellington
I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire	Anne Shelton
Moonlight Serenade	Glenn Miller
I Vow to Thee My Country	The Honley Male Voice Choir