

## Discussion Questions for *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler

*Some questions taken or adapted from the publisher*

1. Early on in *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, the character Rosemary Cooke tells the reader that she will start her story “in the middle.” Why is it important to her to skip the beginning?
2. Rosemary recounts many memories of the chimpanzee Fern and their brief life together. How were she and Fern, in the language of the novel, “Same” and “NotSame”?
3. How did being co-raised with a chimpanzee impact Rosemary’s development?
4. Consider Rosemary’s father and mother. Are they good parents? Should they have handled Fern’s leaving any differently? If so, how?
5. Each member of the Cooke family was dramatically – indeed, traumatically – affected by the loss of Fern. Did they share a personal sense of guilt? Of regret? Of responsibility for what happened? If so, how did these emotions manifest themselves in each family member?
6. What is your opinion of Rosemary’s brother Lowell? Are his extreme views and actions at all justified? Does he truly have Fern’s well-being at heart?
7. How does Harlow Fielding’s whirlwind entrance into Rosemary Cooke’s world alter Rosemary’s trajectory through life?
8. Think about the significance of memory and storytelling in the novel. How is Rosemary’s memory – and, consequently, her narrative – affected by the emotional trauma she has experienced?
9. Consider Harlow Fielding and Ezra Metzger’s failed attempt to liberate monkeys from the primate center, both the motivations of these co-conspirators and the outcome itself. Was their mission in any way an admirable act?
10. Do you think Rosemary comes to find peace with her family history by the end of *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*?
11. Is animal experimentation ever justified? If so, under what circumstances?
12. Talk about how you experienced this book – is it too sad, too tragic to contemplate? Or did you find it in some way uplifting?
13. Did you find the characters believable? Which of the characters did you like the most? Which did you dislike?
14. Did you find the dialog in the story realistic?
15. What did you think of the plot line development? How credible did the author make the plot? Did the plot take turns you did not expect, or did you find it predictable?
16. Has anyone had any experiences that relate to places or experiences in the book?
17. Any comments about the way the book ended?
18. Are there questions you would like to ask?