

Topics & Questions for Discussion

Source: <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Dear-Mrs-Bird/AJ-Pearce/9781501170065>

1. “There’s nothing that can’t be sorted with common sense and a strong will,” (page 36) 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 favorite 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,” (page 54). 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 on page 239 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?” (page 243). 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?

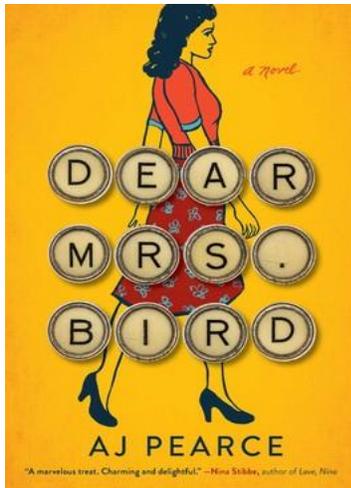
12. In the Author's Note (page 277), AJ Pearce describes how reading advice columns in vintage magazines inspired her to write *Dear Mrs. Bird*. She says, "I found them thought-provoking, moving, and inspirational, and my admiration for the women of that time never stops growing. . . . It is a privilege to look into their world and remember what incredible women and girls they all were" (page 278). Discuss how magazines, then and now, provide a unique window into people's lives.

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Discuss advice columns as a group. Do you read them? Which ones? What are some of the group's favorites? Bring some advice columns in and discuss them together. How would you write an advice column?

2. On pages 204 and 205, Emmy describes seeing propaganda posters meant to motivate and boost morale on the British home front during the war. Visit the Imperial War Museum's website to see examples: www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/second-world-war-posters.





BOOK SUMMARY:

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This charming, irresistible debut novel set in London during World War II about a young woman who longs to be a war correspondent and inadvertently becomes a secret advice columnist is “a jaunty, heartbreaking winner” (*People*)—for fans of *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* and *Lilac Girls*.

Emmeline Lake and her best friend Bunty are doing their bit for the war effort and trying to stay cheerful, despite the German planes making their nightly raids. Emmy dreams of becoming a Lady War Correspondent, and when she spots a job advertisement in the newspaper she seizes her chance; but after a rather unfortunate misunderstanding, she finds herself typing letters for the formidable Henrietta Bird, renowned advice columnist of *Woman’s Friend* magazine.

Mrs. Bird is very clear: letters containing any Unpleasantness must go straight into the bin. But as Emmy reads the desperate pleas from women who many have Gone Too Far with the wrong man, or can’t bear to let their children be evacuated, she begins to secretly write back to the readers who have poured out their troubles.

“Fans of Jojo Moyes will enjoy AJ Pearce’s debut, with its plucky female characters and fresh portrait of women’s lives in wartime Britain” (*Library Journal*)—a love letter to the enduring power of friendship, the kindness of strangers, and the courage of ordinary people in extraordinary times. “Headlined by its winning lead character, who always keeps carrying on, Pearce’s novel is a delight” (*Publishers Weekly*). Irrepressibly funny and enormously moving, *Dear Mrs. Bird* is “funny and poignant...about the strength of women and the importance of friendship” (*Star Tribune*, Minneapolis).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Source: <https://www.ajpearce.com/about>

AJ Pearce was born in Hampshire, UK. Her favourite subjects at school were English and History, which now (finally!) seems to be making some sense.

She attended the University of Sussex where she majored in American History, spending her Junior Year at Northwestern University in Illinois, USA.

She began writing as a hobby in 2005. In 2012 she came across a 1939 copy of a weekly women's magazine and the idea of writing a novel set in wartime London was born.

In early 2016 AJ finished *Dear Mrs Bird* and signed with literary agent [Jo Unwin](#). A week after the novel was submitted, following a seven-publisher auction in the UK, *Dear Mrs Bird* was acquired by Picador, and in the USA by Scribner after a similarly competitive auction.

Translation rights have been sold in a further thirteen countries and the novel has now been optioned for development for television.

Two weeks after it was published, *Dear Mrs Bird* became a Sunday Times Top 10 Bestseller.

AJ was one of *The Observer's* New Faces Of Fiction Debut Novelists 2018, and was shortlisted in the Breakthrough Author category in the UK's 2018 Books Are My Bag Readers Awards. *Dear Mrs Bird* was chosen as one of NetGalley UK's Top Ten Books of 2018, and shortlisted in the US LibraryReads Favorites of Favorites 2018, voted for by staff in public libraries.

AJ is currently writing her second novel, the sequel to *Dear Mrs Bird*.