THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING

Set in Kerrville, Kansas, “The Center of Everything” is told by Evelyn Bucknow, a young girl wincing her way through adolescence, living with her single mother in a small apartment. With a voice that is as charming as it is recognizable, Evelyn draws the reader into the dramas of an entire community through her wholly refreshing way of looking at the world.

THE KU COMMON BOOK PROGRAM

The KU Common Book program connects first-year students like you to a compelling piece of literature, to KU’s community of scholars, and to each other.

You received a copy of this year’s KU Common Book, Laura Moriarty’s “The Center of Everything,” from your Orientation Assistant, who’s read it cover to cover.

As you make your way through the book over the summer, use this reading guide, and take to Twitter with the #KUCommonBook hashtag to start the conversation with OAs and fellow first-year students. In the fall, we’ll explore “The Center of Everything” together through the KU Common Book events listed below — they’ll be some of your first chances to think critically and engage intellectually as a Jayhawk.

KU COMMON BOOK EVENTS

Google Chat with author Laura Moriarty
Week of July 27, 2014
Watch Facebook and Twitter for dates and times.

Common Book Discussion Groups
1-2 p.m.
Aug. 24, 2014
Residence Halls and Various Campus Locations

“Is This Reality?”
Sept. 11, 2014
Spencer Museum of Art and the Natural History Museum

An Evening with Author Laura Moriarty
7:30 p.m.
Oct. 23, 2014
Lied Center

Coffee and Conversation with Laura Moriarty
9 a.m.
Oct. 24, 2014
Natural History Museum

commonbook.ku.edu will stay up-to-date with event details, announcements, and resources throughout the summer and academic year. Check it often, and follow First-Year Experience socially:

facebook.com/kufye
twitter.com/NewJayhawks
instagram.com/newjayhawks
2014 KU COMMON BOOK READERS GUIDE

For each of the 20 chapters of “The Center of Everything,” this readers guide offers questions to help you explore the book’s events, themes, and 1980s Kansas setting, as well as prompts to drive deeper online and contribute to ongoing discussions.

The goal? To read actively. Engaged reading will help you retain details from the book and form the thoughts and opinions you’ll contribute during activities on campus. (You’ll find a list of those events in this guide.)

Here are a few active reading tips:
• Ask questions and admit if something isn’t obvious at first.
• Write in the book. This will help you keep track of your thoughts as you read.
• Do you sense that images, dialogues, or ideas recur or relate? Connect the dots. Don’t worry—there’s no “right” or “wrong.”
• Make it personal. You’ll gain deeper insight if you can relate to the emotions and experiences you find.

How do stereotypes, simplifications, and misconceptions factor into the events of this chapter? What insights about Evelyn and Traci does the reader have that both girls do not?

Have a throwback photo of your own science fair triumph? Post it to Instagram with #KUCBreadhead.

Evelyn explains the way she believes stories start: “Someone is blessed, picked out as special by someone who can tell, their luckiness planted deep inside them, sure as a seed.” How does Evelyn use the word “blessed”? Does it carry more than one meaning?

Tweet the first sentence of a story you’ll start at KU and use #KUCommonBook.

Evelyn refers to romantic chemistry as science, calling it “biology at work.” What does this perspective say about Evelyn— and does she fully believe it?

What is Evelyn referring to when she calls her mother a “welfare queen”? What is Evelyn referring to when she says, “things can look one way and be another, depending on where you’re standing.” How does this quote connect to the “period piece” nature of this novel?

Evelyn watches Ronald Reagan accept the Republican presidential nomination. You can see it on Youtube:
youtu.be/A3pT8dQJPw?t=10s

As Evelyn says, “things can look one way and be another, depending on where you’re standing.” How does this quote connect to the “period piece” nature of this novel?

Evelyn compares her conflict with Tina to “one of the black lines between states on maps” that is invisible but observed. How else does Evelyn demarcate her life?

For background on welfare as a political issue in the ’80s, read this address by Ronald Reagan:
bity.ly/KUCBwelfare

Evelyn claims that her mother “is the opposite of Madonna.” How does reality and pop culture clash for Evelyn? How does Evelyn’s friend Deena “use” pop culture?

In her Walkman, Deena probably has Madonna’s first album. Listen to it on Rdio:
rd.io/x/QFz2PkLEpQ/

“Agency, Verranna Hinckle calls it. For Evelyn, “the lines keep crossing over one another” when it comes to the Ms. Jenkins controversy. On how many sides does Evelyn find herself standing? What does each represent?

For a taste of ’80s MTV — Deena’s favorite channel — check out this response evolved over the course of the book?

“Why does Evelyn feel so drawn to the Panorama in KU’s Natural History Museum? What about ‘easily stepping from one world to another’ appeals to Evelyn? How is this book similar to the panorama Evelyn loves?

Take a panorama picture of your world and tweet it. Be sure to use #KUCommonBook.

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Evelyn spends time in two separate worlds: church and school. How are they similar? Different? How is Evelyn processing the “lessons” gained from each?

Tweet about an issue on which you stand on both sides. Include #KUCommonBook.

In this chapter, Evelyn is kept from watching “The Day After,” a made-for-TV movie set in Lawrence that dramatizes nuclear war. How does the film affect Evelyn and Tina?

Check out the trailer for “The Day After” on Youtube: youtu.be/xB1ZTkuVz4A

Evelyn’s upset when her mother tells her that “beggars can’t be choosers.” What is a cliché? Why do people use them — and avoid them?

Bracing for bad news, Evelyn says, “There can’t be anything else. But of course, I know, really there could be. It’s not like there are rules.” How is this statement significant for Evelyn?

Working over the summer like Evelyn? Tell us how you earn a paycheck. (Include #KUCommonBook.)

Unlike a multiple-choice quiz in an issue of Cosmopolitan, Evelyn claims “the right answer is never this obvious in real life.” What choices has Evelyn made that may not have seemed right at first?

Evelyn’s favorite song, “Fast Car,” is the second track on Tracy Chapman’s self-titled debut album. Listen to it on Rdio:
rd.io/a/QFz2PKY4-4q/

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Tweet a cliché you never want to hear again, and use the #KUCBreadhead hashtag.

Upon hearing tragic news, Evelyn believes she “should be crying, that this is the appropriate response.” Yet she doesn’t. How has Evelyn’s perspective on “appropriate response” evolved over the course of the book?

Evelyn compares Adele, Traci, and Libby to the Go-Go’s. She’s probably talking about that band’s “Our Lips Are Sealed” video:
youtu.be/xKqGzisU77M

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