

## 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.

[commonbook.ku.edu](http://commonbook.ku.edu)

## 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](http://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](https://www.facebook.com/kufye)

 [twitter.com/NewJayhawks](https://twitter.com/NewJayhawks)

 [instagram.com/newjayhawks](https://www.instagram.com/newjayhawks)

  
The University of Kansas  
FIRST-YEAR  
EXPERIENCE

BY LAURA MORIARTY  
**THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING**  
2014 KU COMMON BOOK  
READERS GUIDE

# 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 ways to dive deeper online and contribute to ongoing discussions.

The goal? To read actively. Active, 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, dialogue, or ideas reoccur 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.

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 says that she likes living in Kansas, "not just because of the wheat, but because it's right in the center." What does this thought reveal about Evelyn? How does it connect to her sense of self and the world around her?

*Kansas is also at the center of Google Earth. Don't believe us? Download it and zoom — you'll land in Chanute, a small Kansas town like Kerriville.*

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"? This clip from NPR will fill you in: [n.pr/1uUjEwM](http://n.pr/1uUjEwM)*

Evelyn says that watching the bees in Ms. Jenkins' classroom is "like watching some secret." Why is Evelyn so drawn to observation? In what ways is this book's narrative an act of observation?

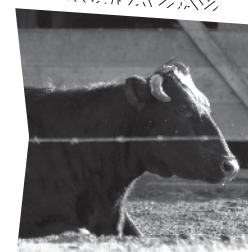
*Watch a live feed of KU's bee colony at [bit.ly/KUbeecam](http://bit.ly/KUbeecam)*

Protesters rally outside of Evelyn's school because, as Mrs. Hansen tells Evelyn, "Ms. Jenkins want to teach evolution. It gets people stirred up." How does this controversy affect Evelyn?

*Did you watch Bill Nye and Ken Ham's evolution debate earlier this year? [youtu.be/z6kgvhG3AKI](http://youtu.be/z6kgvhG3AKI)*

Looking out of the car window, Evelyn describes "grain elevators and rest stops, clusters of cows behind barbed-wire fences and fields of blue stem grass that look so green [she] can't stand it." How would you describe the Kansas landscape?

*Post a photo on Instagram of the landscape where you live and tag it with #KUCommonBook.*



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?

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

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/xBfZTkuVzt4](http://youtu.be/xBfZTkuVzt4)*

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 a moment when, like Evelyn, you wish you could've shouted "Amen" in class. Be sure to use #KUCommonBook.*

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 responses" 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/r3kQIzOi27M](http://youtu.be/r3kQIzOi27M)*

"Agency, Verranna Hinckle calls it. Give him agency. Verranna Hinckle has a lot of words like this." Does Evelyn mean this comment as criticism, admiration, or something in between?

*For a taste of '80s MTV — Deena's favorite channel — check out this video on YouTube: [youtu.be/vIZBnyXFKr0](http://youtu.be/vIZBnyXFKr0)*

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?

*Tweet about an issue on which you stand on both sides. (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/x/QFz2PKY4-g/](http://rd.io/x/QFz2PKY4-g/)*

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. (Include #KUCommonBook.)*

