

# **BOOK CLUB To Go!**

## **Olive Kitteridge**

### **By Elizabeth Strout**

#### **Introduction**

In a voice more powerful and compassionate than ever before, *New York Times* bestselling author Elizabeth Strout binds together thirteen rich, luminous narratives into a book with the heft of a novel, through the presence of one larger-than-life, unforgettable character: Olive Kitteridge.

At the edge of the continent, Crosby, Maine, may seem like nowhere, but seen through this brilliant writer's eyes, it's in essence the whole world, and the lives that are lived there are filled with all of the grand human drama—desire, despair, jealousy, hope, and love.

At times stern, at other times patient, at times perceptive, at other times in sad denial, Olive Kitteridge, a retired schoolteacher, deplores the changes in her little town and in the world at large, but she doesn't always recognize the changes in those around her: a lounge musician haunted by a past romance: a former student who has lost the will to live: Olive's own adult child, who feels tyrannized by her irrational sensitivities; and Henry, who finds his loyalty to his marriage both a blessing and a curse.

As the townspeople grapple with their problems, mild and dire, Olive is brought to a deeper understanding of herself and her life—sometimes painfully, but always with ruthless honesty. *Olive Kitteridge* offers profound insights into the human condition—its conflicts, its tragedies and joys, and the endurance it requires.

([barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com))

## About the Author

Elizabeth Strout is the author of *Abide with Me*, a national bestseller and Book Sense pick, and *Amy and Isabelle*, which won the *Los Angeles Times* Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction and the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Prize. She has also been a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Orange Prize in England. Her short stories have been published in a number of magazines, including *The New Yorker* and *O: The Oprah Magazine*. She is on the faculty of the MFA program at Queens University in Charlotte, North Carolina, and lives in New York City.

([randomhouse.com](http://randomhouse.com))

## **Author Interview by Random House Reader's Circle**

Random House Reader's Circle sat down with Olive Kitteridge and Elizabeth Strout in a doughnut shop in Olive's hometown of Crosby, Maine.

**Random House Reader's Circle:** Thank you both for meeting with us. This is such a treat.

**Olive Kitteridge:** Well, it's strange, I'll say that.

**Elizabeth Strout:** It's lovely to be here, thank you.

**Q. RHRC:** Ms. Strout, our first question is for you. Which characters were the easiest for you to write?

**A. ES:** The easiest character to write about was Olive herself. She is so vibrant, so powerful in her desires and opinions, she came to me fully formed and with little trouble. Whenever she walked through a door, took a ride in her car, or walked along the river, I felt lucky to follow her.

Harmon, the hardware store owner, was also easily available to me, though in a very different way. His quiet sadness helped me see him, made me feel for his situation. Louise Larkin came to me clearly, as did Jack Kennison, and Angela O'Meara. And the steadfast Henry, of course.

**OK:** Wait, you were *following* me? I knew it. I don't know why you felt so compelled to write about me. There are far more interesting people in Crosby to talk about.

**ES:** I did talk about them, Olive. But the truth is, you are the most fascinating to me. You are ferocious and complicated and kindly and sometimes cruel. In essence, you are a little bit of each of us.

*(randomhouse.com)*

## Reviews

"Perceptive, deeply empathetic . . . Olive is the axis around which these thirteen complex, relentlessly human narratives spin themselves into Elizabeth Strout's unforgettable novel in stories." –*O: The Oprah Magazine*

"Fiction lovers, remember this name: **Olive Kitteridge**. . . . You'll never forget her. . . . [Elizabeth Strout] constructs her stories with rich irony and moments of genuine surprise and intense emotion. . . . Glorious, powerful stuff." –*USA Today*

"Funny, wicked and remorseful, Mrs. Kitteridge is a compelling life force, a red-blooded original. When she's not onstage, we look forward to her return. The book is a page-turner because of her." –*San Francisco Chronicle*

"*Olive Kitteridge* still lingers in memory like a treasured photograph." –*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

([readinggroupguides.com](http://readinggroupguides.com))

## Further Reading

*Cranberry Queen* by Kathleen DeMarco

*Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* by Fannie Flagg

*Empress of the Splendid Season* by Oscar Hijuelos

*Preacher's Lake* by Lisa Vice

*The Easter Parade* by Richard Yates

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**Possible Discussion Questions**

1. How does loneliness initially appear in *Olive Kitteridge*?
2. What does Jim O'Casey mean to Olive?
3. How is Jim O'Casey important to Olive and Henry's marriage?
4. What is Olive's relationship with her son like as he is growing up?
5. Why does Christopher move away, and how do Olive and Henry react?
6. What is the significance of schadenfreude in *Olive Kitteridge*?
7. What does Olive's visit to New York illustrate about her character?
8. What does Olive's relationship with Jack Kennison reveal about *Olive Kitteridge's* theme of loneliness and love?
9. Do you like Olive Kitteridge as a person?
10. Have you ever met anyone like Olive Kitteridge, and if so, what similarities do you see between that person and Olive?
11. How would you say Olive changed as a person during the course of the book?

*(NoveList and readinggroupguides.com)*