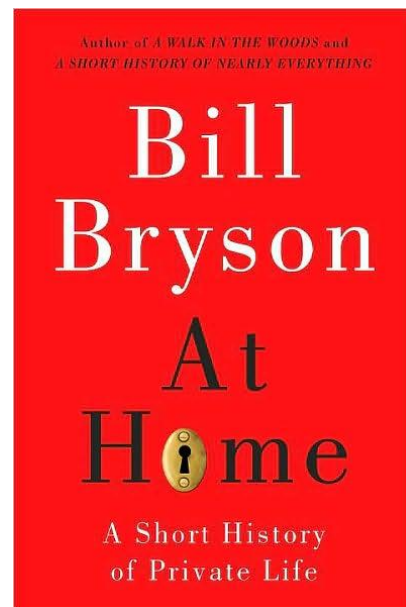


Reading Guide:  
***At Home:***  
***A Short History of Private Life***  
Bill Bryson (2010)



1. The titles of the chapters in *At Home* are the various rooms in a house. Why do you think Bryson chose to format the book this way? Do you think this worked to his advantage or disadvantage?
2. Did Bryson describe any one innovation that stood out to you as key to the development of domestic life as we see it now? Why was it important? Is it something we take for granted in the modern era?
3. Bryson covers an incredible range of topics within material culture. Is there anything you would like to have seen covered in greater depth? Why?
4. Bryson details the history of some of the most benign and overlooked conveniences of modern life. Among them are lighting, glass, and ice. Were the histories of any of these “inventions” particularly interesting to you? Surprising?
5. Do you think Bryson’s writing style portrays an accurate account of the development of modern life? Do you think he is biased in any way?
6. Bryson told NPR that he wanted “to treat his own home as ‘a universe in its own right,’”<sup>1</sup> with *At Home* being the result of it. What do you think he means, and do you think he succeeds in doing this?
7. Did reading this book give you a greater appreciation of any aspects of contemporary home life?

### **About Bill Bryson**

Bill Bryson was born in Iowa and moved to England in 1973. While in England he worked as a journalist. He moved to Hanover, New Hampshire, the home of Dartmouth College, in 1995 and then moved back to England in 2003. Currently he is the Chancellor of Durham University in Norfolk.

### **If you liked *At Home*, you may like these other books by Bill Bryson**

- ***The Lost Continent: Travels in Small-Town America (1989)*** | Bryson journeys through the United States, starting at his childhood home in small town Iowa.
- ***The Neither Here nor There: Travels in Europe (1991)*** | A collection of columns that Bryson wrote from America after living in England for twenty years.
- ***Notes from a Strange Island (1995)*** | Bryson discovers England's geography and culture as he explores the country.
- ***A Made in America: An Informal History of the English Language in the United States (1998)*** | Why are there so many words that solely Americans use? Why do we use the words we do? Bryson explores the etymology of American English.
- ***Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail (1998)*** | Bryson treks up the Appalachian Trail with a long lost friend and discovers what makes parts of America unique.
- ***I'm a Stranger Here Myself: Notes on Returning to America after 20 Years Away (1999)*** | Bryson's commentary on life in America after years of living abroad.
- ***The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir (2006)*** | A memoir and reflection of Bryson's 1950s childhood in small town Iowa.

### **Related Texts**

- ***Our Tempestuous Day: A History of Regency England***, Carrolly Erikson (2011) | A look at life in early 19<sup>th</sup> century England and the influence of the Regent King, George of Hanover.
- ***Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England***, Amanda Vickery (2010) | The intricacies and social culture of England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130273636>