

“A powerhouse of a Southern novel. This lush and mesmerizing debut has a beating heart of its own.” —ANDREA BOBOTIS, author of *The Last List of Miss Judith Kratt*

# *the* floating girls



*a novel*

LO PATRICK

# READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Water is a common symbol and plays an important role throughout the book. Discuss the ways in which water appears throughout the story and its significance.
2. Discuss how Kay's age influences how she perceives everything happening around her.
3. Kay likes to push the boundaries—especially with her father. Discuss the ways in which she does this and the consequences later on in the book.
4. As the youngest child, Kay struggles to have her voice heard

in her family. In what ways do you see this, and how does it impact her behavior?

5. How do you think the story would change if it were told from the perspective of Peter, Freddy, or Andy?
6. In some ways, Kay seems wise beyond her years. But in other ways, it's clear she is still a child. Discuss in what ways this is evident and its impact on the story as it progresses.
7. Peter seems to have the most knowledge of the bad blood between the Whitakers and the Webbers. How does this influence his reaction to Sue-Bess's arrest, Sarah-Anne's disappearance, and their father's reaction to these events?
8. Why do you think Sue-Bess doesn't reveal to the police who is responsible for Sarah-Anne's disappearance?
9. At one point, Kay says, "I pretended to care deeply about the tree; anything to avoid watching my mother have a personality." Do you remember when you first started seeing your parents as people beyond their roles of "mom" and "dad"?
10. Kay clearly has a rebellious streak. Did you ever go through a rebellious period when you were younger?

11. Memory is a tricky thing. How much do you think one's memory can be trusted? How does this play out in the book?
12. What do you think comes next for Kay as she moves on into young adulthood and beyond?



# A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

## **What inspired you to write *The Floating Girls*?**

The Georgia coast is a hauntingly beautiful place. Between the beach towns popular with tourists and the more developed cities, on intracoastal waterways and barrier islands, are tiny slices of a life that have largely been forgotten or ignored—places that have failed to keep up with the pace of their better-known neighbors. We have spent a lot of time heading south from our home in Atlanta. I am an avid people-watcher and side-of-the-road observer. I like watching the houses and small, hardly noticed towns slide by the car window. We were on a certain stretch of road not far from Richmond Hill, Georgia, when I saw a house and spot of land that inspired me to create Kay and her family. I could perfectly imagine

all that might be happening so close to the water and tucked so far back away from the rest of the world.

**Why did you decide to write the book from Kay's point of view?**

**In what ways did this influence how the story developed?**

Kay, although unrefined, is very bright and perceptive. I wanted to see the world through her eyes, speak through her mouth, and think with her head. While I was writing, it was almost as though I was getting to know her as the plot moved forward. I made her facial expressions while writing and could vividly “see” her in her dresses, barefoot, fidgeting her way through life, yearning for adventure. This is a book about a family, but the experiences in it are uniquely Kay's. For me, there was only one way to tell her story—let her tell it.

**When writing, what comes first to you: the plot of the story or the characters?**

For me, definitely the characters and the setting. The plot is like a hovering cloud, and I am waiting for it to rain. Sometimes it comes down in torrents, other times a long, slow drizzle. The plot falls on my characters and their environment and has to be woven into their personality. It can make for tricky editing, but I find it is much more organic to let the characters—once I know them—tell me what happened.

**What was your path to becoming a writer? Did you always know you wanted to write novels?**

Not really. I had a very fantastical, perhaps naive view of creative people and creative careers before really giving writing my all. It wasn't until after I completed my law degree that I truly grasped how much hard work goes into writing, editing, rewriting, scrap-  
ping, and starting over time and time again. I figured if I could get through all of those solitary hours in the law library working on papers and academic articles, then I could do anything. I was a musician in Los Angeles during my younger years, and although I thought I loved performing, I was actually much more drawn to the creative process in the studio and while writing music than I was with the spectacle of live performance. I am a true introvert and thrive when alone and in deep thought—the perfect disposition for a writer.

**What is your writing process like in terms of your routine (i.e., when and where you write)? Do you develop an outline for a book first, or do you let the story take you where it needs to go?**

I write in my office at home or in local coffee shops, the park, on an airplane, in a hotel lobby, while sitting at a bar in a restaurant, really anywhere. Sometimes I need the solitude of home, while other times I need the energy of people and events around me. I write with headphones on and music playing—highly unusual, I know. I am not really listening to the songs, which are mostly like white

noise, but it helps me to get out of one world and get into another if I can't hear anything going on around me. I learned to people-watch with soundtracks of my choosing while living in New York City. It has proven an invaluable skill as an author, because there is no environment in which I cannot concentrate and escape into my story. And no, I do not outline. I have never been able to be that organized about anything!

**What are some of the books you've read that have influenced your writing?**

Where to begin! I will read anything (including grocery lists) that Joan Didion, Penelope Lively, Truman Capote, or Alice Munro has written. I have devoured much of Margaret Atwood's, Anne Tyler's, and Larry McMurtry's bodies of work as well. When asked my favorite books, I always give the same answer—*A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley, *The Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, and *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier.

**Do books have a designated place in your home? What's on your TBR (to-be-read) pile these days?**

Books are EVERYWHERE in our house. I have two young children who are also avid readers, so almost every surface is covered with at least a handful of books. My nightstand is where I keep what I am currently reading and about to read. Right now I have designs

on finishing the Wolf Hall trilogy by Hilary Mantel, completing *My Name Is Red* by Orhan Pamuk, and revisiting some Graham Greene classics that I read when I was younger.