



Small Things Like These

By Claire Keegan



It is 1985 in New Ross, a small Irish town in County Wexford. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, Bill Furlong, a coal merchant and family man with five daughters, faces into his busiest season. Early one morning, while delivering an order to the local convent, Bill makes a discovery which forces him to confront both his own past and the knowing silences of the town about what is going on there.

The book is a contender for the 2022 Booker Prize, the shortest novel ever to be shortlisted.

Here are some questions to think about, adapted from the ones on the Booker Prize website <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/reading-guide-small-things-like-these-by-claire-keegan>

Discussion Questions

1. What do we learn about Furlong's past and what effect do you think it has had on him?

Does it affect the decision he makes at the end?

2. The novel is set in 1985:

'The Taoiseach had signed an agreement with Thatcher over the North, and the Unionists in Belfast were out marching with drums, protesting over Dublin having any say in their affairs.'

In what ways (if any) do The Troubles seem to affect the community where Furlong lives?

3. *'Lately he had begun to wonder what mattered, apart from Eileen and the girls. He was touching forty but he didn't feel himself to be getting anywhere or making any kind of headway and could not but sometimes wonder what the days were for.'*

Why do you think Furlong feels like this?

4. Did you suspect what was going on before Furlong's discovery? If so, what clues were there?

5. Do you think the community were aware of it? If so, why did they do nothing?

6. What do you think of the ending? Is it frustrating or an invitation to readers to create the rest of the story ourselves. What do you think happens to Bill Furlong and his family?

7. The book is set at Christmas time. Does it feel like a Christmas story? Why/why not?