

FREDRIK BACKMAN

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
ANXIOUS PEOPLE

BRITT-MARIE WAS HERE

"Backman's truest,
most satisfying
book to date."
—*Paste Magazine*



ESL 360 BOOK CLUB

Chapters 1 -3

28 January 2026

Weekly Book Club Assignments, Group A (10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.)

Week	Date	Reading	Ira	Flavia	Maria	Lisa	Mariana	Banu	Fatemeh
2	28 Jan	Ch 1-3	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Time Keeper
3	4 Feb	Ch 4-5	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Time Keeper
4	11 Feb	Ch 6-8	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Time Keeper
5	18 Feb	Ch 9-11	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Time Keeper
6	25 Feb	Ch 12-14	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Time Keeper
7	4 Mar	Ch 15-17	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Time Keeper
8	11 Mar	Ch 18-20	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Time Keeper
	18 Mar	NO BOOK CLUB — SPRING BREAK							
9	25 Mar	Ch 21-23	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Time Keeper
10	1 Apr	Ch 24-26	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Time Keeper
11	8 Apr	Ch 27-29	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Time Keeper
12	15 Apr	Ch 30-32	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Time Keeper
13	22 Apr	Ch 33-34	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Time Keeper
14	29 Apr	Ch 35-36	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Time Keeper
15	6 May	Ch 37	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Time Keeper
16	13 May	Ch 38	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer & Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Time Keeper

Weekly Book Club Assignments, Group B (11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.)

Week	Date	Reading	Monica	Cristy	Esmeralda	Yulianna	Lily S.	Yariela	Lily L.
2	28 Jan	Ch 1-3	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker
3	4 Feb	Ch 4-5	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer
4	11 Feb	Ch 6-8	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker
5	18 Feb	Ch 9-11	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder
6	25 Feb	Ch 12-14	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter
7	4 Mar	Ch 15-17	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer
8	11 Mar	Ch 18-20	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist
	18 Mar	NO BOOK CLUB — SPRING BREAK							
9	25 Mar	Ch 21-23	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker
10	1 Apr	Ch 24-26	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer
11	8 Apr	Ch 27-29	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker
12	15 Apr	Ch 30-32	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder
13	22 Apr	Ch 33-34	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter
14	29 Apr	Ch 35-36	Word Artist	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer
15	6 May	Ch 37	Connection Maker	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist
16	13 May	Ch 38	Summarizer	Deep Thinker	Vocab Builder	Sound Spotter	Character Analyzer	Word Artist	Connection Maker

60-SECOND SUMMARIZER

IRA

The first chapter tells the story of a 63-year-old woman who, while at an unemployment office, tries to have a conversation with a young woman working there. The young woman doesn't quite grasp or understand the tremendous effort Britt-Marie is making to engage in polite conversation in such strange and unusual circumstances for her: firstly, the complete and utter disarray in small, everyday things, and secondly, the search for a job after 40 years of life filled with caring for her husband, his business, her twins, and of course, her balcony. The conversation ends in complete misunderstanding on both sides.

The second chapter describes the following morning, where the young girl is surprised to see Britt-Marie and tries to explain that she doesn't have time for an appointment, that she's busy with a meeting. Britt-Marie, with remarkable patience, waits until the end of the meeting, immersing herself in memories of soccer in her past life, its influence on the disappearance of crosswords from newspapers, and without paying much attention to what the girl is saying, schedules a meeting for 5 o'clock and dinner for 6.

In the third chapter, Britt-Marie is at 4:55 outside the unemployment office door. Before that, she had visited a supermarket, but not her usual one, where she bought pencils and sharpeners for the young woman at the office, as well as salmon for dinner at 6:00 PM. And now, the astonished young woman, apparently having lost the ability to resist, gives in to Britt-Marie and shows her the kitchen, where, miraculously, they begin a heartfelt conversation about why Britt-Marie is there and why it is important to her right now.

DEEP THINKER

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I R A

- Why do you think the author keeps returning to the theme of the balcony throughout several chapters?
- Does filling out forms really help other people understand who we are?
- Why does society require a preposterous amount of administration to let one take a part?

60-SECOND SUMMARIZER

MONICA

Britt-Marie visits the unemployment office seeking a fresh start. Having been a stay-at-home wife with no formal education, she was defined by her obsession with order and cleaning.

With only the promise of a future phone call by the girl that takes care of her, Britt-Marie headed back to her hostel. There, she remained tied to the memory of a life that had long since passed her by.

Britt-Marie appears at the office the next morning, bright and early. Refusing to wait a minute longer she confronts the girl that helped her the day before. The girl dismisses Britt-Marie telling her again that she would be contacted at a later time, but Britt-Marie makes up her mind to return at closing time.

When Britt-Marie arrives, she sees the girl preparing to leave, but Britt Marie ignores the situation and asks to use the office kitchen to cook dinner. It is then that the girl realizes Britt-Marie is a lonely woman with no sense of belonging--no longer married, desperate for a job, and haunted by the insecurity that she might live unnoticed and eventually die alone.

DEEP THINKER

CRISTY

1. What do you think Britt Marie's husband is like?
2. Why is she so organized?
3. Why does she want to look for a job?

VOCABULARY BUILDER

FLAVIA

COASTER (noun): A coaster is a small mat to protect surfaces from drinks.

“... and waits to be offered a coaster.” (p11)

Example: Can you give some coaster to put under my glass?

Extra: Talking to my husband while he drank beer, I told him: I think you should put coaster under the glass so it doesn't mark my table. I said the sentence in Portuguese but coaster in English.



VEXES (Vex - verb): If someone or something vexes you, they make you feel annoyed, irritated, and frustrated.

Checks her watch. She seems uncomfortable, which vexes Britt Marie.” (p6)

Example: Being late vexes me.



MUMBLES (Mumble - verb): Mumble is to talk quietly in way that it's hard to understand.

“ If Britt Marie asks what he wants for dinner, he just mumbles that it doesn't matter...” (p11)

Example: My daughter mumbles when she is tired.



SHRUGGED (Shrug - verb): Shrug is to raise shoulders to express doubt, ignorance, or indifference.

“... he just shrugged and suggested a different brand.” (p16)

EX: When I was child my mother got really angry when I shrugged at her.



KNUCKLES (noun): Knuckle is the finger joint. They connect the fingers with the palm of the hand. Also it is a part where the fingers bend.

“The girl rubs her eyelids with her knuckles.” P-17

EX: She cracked her knuckles all the time.



FUMBLING (verb): Fumbling means to speak or to do something in awkward or clumsy ways

“ So...you...sort of want a job, so that ...” she says, fumbling. (p19)

EX: I fumble my words when I speak English.
I fumbled with my mug and dropped it



VOCABULARY BUILDER

ESMERALDA

1 .-plastic mug

Book: Britt-Marie doesn't judge anyone. Far from it but who would behave like that? A plastic mug! Are we at war?

My own words: a large cup, usually with a handle, used for coffee, tea, or hot chocolate.

Own life: I don't like drinking beverages from plastic mugs because it tastes different.



2.-Pig headed

Book: The unemployment office opens at 9:00. Britt-Marie waits until 9:02 before going in, because she doesn't want to seem pig headed.

My own words: Someone who refuses to listen and won't change their opinion, even when they're wrong.

Own life : I was pig-headed, I don't listen my husband.



VOCABULARY BUILDER

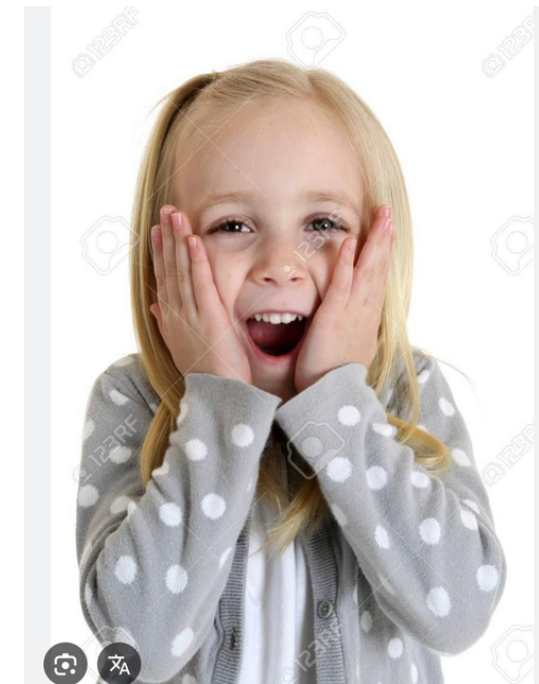
ESMERALDA

3-Astonishingly

Book: it's an astonishingly, astonishingly presentable balcony.

My own words: It is used when something causes a great deal of surprise, sometimes even disbelief.

Example sentence my own life: My daughter Astonishingly, brings food to my bed



4.-Encouragingly

Book: Okay, I can hear you at last," says the girl encouragingly.

My own words: It is used when something gives hope, is motivating, or indicates that things are going well.

Own life

The coach always shouts encouragingly from the sidelines.



SOUND SPOTTER

MARIA

Protruding (adj) sticking out; projecting

“Then she holds out a plastic mug with plastic teaspoons protruding from it.” (p2)

Vexes (verb) make (someone) feel annoyed, frustrated, or worried especially with trivial matters.

“She seems uncomfortable, which vexes Britt-Marie.” (p2)

Enthusiastically (adv) In a way that shows intense and eager, enjoyment, interest, or approval.

“People emerge; the girl says good-bye and smiles enthusiastically, until she notices Britt-Marie.” (p12)

Preposterous (adj) contrary to reason or common sense: utterly absurd or ridiculous. (P20)

“You believe it’s preposterous, of course.” (p20)

/prɒʊ'truːdɪŋ/ (pro- + TROOD + -ing)

Example: I saw a stick protruding from the ground.

/'vɛksɪz/ (VEX-es)

Example: The pain in my legs vexes me all night.

/ɛn.θuːzɪ'æstɪkli/ (en-THOO-zee-AS-tik-lee)

Example: The crowd cheered enthusiastically at the concert.

/prɪ'pɒstə-əs/ (prih-POSS-tər-əs)

Example: “The movie was fun, but some parts were completely preposterous.”

SOUND SPOTTER

YULI ANNA

reluctantly (adv.) [rɪ'lʌktəntli]-re·LUC·tant·ly: To do something which you don't really want to do
"In the end she reluctantly fills in her name, social security number, and her cell phone number." (p4)
schwa = "uh"

Why I selected this word: I'm stressing the wrong syllable in this word. The stress is on the second syllable.

Example: My son prays reluctantly every day. <<<Although this is technically correct, it's a bit more natural to put the adverb--"reluctantly"--before the verb it's modifying--"pray."

threshold (noun) ['θreʃhəʊld] thresh-,hōld: The line you cross to go into a room or house.
" Surely civilized people lift their feet when they walk across bedroom thresholds?" (p5)

Why I selected this word: The letter 'h' makes sounds in both syllables, even though it is only written once.

Ex. The postman dropped some packages on the threshold.

staggeringly (adv) ['stægərɪŋli]: Something that is extremely surprising, shocking, or impressive.
" The girl who works here has staggeringly short hair." (p1)

Why I selected this word: There are two "g" letters, but we pronounce only one /g/ sound.)

Ex. The cake looked staggeringly delicious.

CHARACTER ANALYZER

LISA

Character: Britt-Marie, a sixty-three years old woman, newly separated, looking for a job

Trait: Fastidious

What it means: Fastidious describes someone who pays close attention to detail and is extremely concerned about cleanliness. They like things to be well organized and very clean, and they take excessive care to keep them that way.

Evidence from the Text: The author mentions that Britt's cutlery drawer is organized in the right order, first forks, then knives, and then spoons.

When she goes to the unemployment office and the girl offers her a cup of coffee, at first, she complains about the plastic mug, and then she asks for a coaster because she doesn't want to make marks on the table.

Another example is when she lives with her husband and sprinkles the mattress with baking soda for 20 minutes before she makes the bed every day.

Britt-Marie also loves making lists. She has so many lists that she even keeps a separate list to list all her lists. Everything she does is organized with a list, such as her day or her shopping.

These situations show that Britt Marie is fastidious. She cares a lot about keeping her house clean and organized, and it is important to her that everything is in the right place.

CHARACTER ANALYZER

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LILY S.

Britt- Marie is the Main Character in the book. She is 63 years old. She is a woman with a peculiar personality, but she is not difficult, fussy or demanding; she simply expects things to be done in a certain way.

Britt-Marie uses a specific, cheerful tone as a defense mechanism and as a way of showing kindness, acting against her natural impulse to impose strict order when trying to be patient with the disorder, or lack of organization of others, or when she makes a great effort not to criticize someone. She doesn't judge anyone.

She used to live for and through her husband, in his shadow, maintaining a perfectly organized home, obsessed with cleanliness and order. She was Always a housewife who never had a professional career, only working as a waitress when she was single. When she discovered her husband's infidelity, she reacted. Britt - Marie has gone from a perfectly organized life to a disorganized one. She left home. Now she is a brave, bold and persevering woman, looking for a job.

WORD ARTIST

M A R I A N A

Scene Description: Unemployment Office

Britt-Marie stands inside the unemployment office, surrounded by plastic mugs and papers everywhere. The room looks old and disorganized as if it has not changed in many years. The furniture is worn and the pale walls make the space feel cold and unfriendly.

There is a weak smell of old coffee coming from the plastic mugs on the desks. Papers are stacked in messy piles, some bent and yellow, making the office feel crowded and chaotic. The place has the feeling of an old building, full of silence and waiting.

Britt Marie sits very straight in a hard chair. Her body feels tense, nervous, and anxious, but she does not move. The ticking of the clock sounds loud in the silent room, reminding her that time is passing and that her life is changing.

The unemployed office makes Britt-Marie feels afraid of looking for a job and starting over. She has never worked before, and the old office makes her feel small and uncertain. At the same time, she feels a quiet strength growing inside her. This place, as uncomfortable and disorganized as it is, represents a new beginning and a chance to rebuild her life.

WORD ARTIST

YARIELA

CONNECTION MAKER

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BANU

CONNECTION MAKER

LILY L.

In the novel “Britt-Marie Was Here,” there is a clear connection between the main character and the social norms of the past that shaped a woman’s role in the family and society.

Britt-Marie is used to finding security in marriage, household duties, and daily rituals. She defines her value through caring for her husband, his children, and the home. This reflects a social culture in which women were often financially and emotionally dependent on men.

At the beginning of the novel, it becomes clear that despite her perfectionism and dedication, Britt-Marie is unable to maintain a stable relationship. Her husband is unfaithful, even though he remains the center of her life. While focusing on the needs of others, Britt-Marie hides her inner emptiness behind calming routines and strict control. She lives a monotonous life shaped by repetition.

I emphasize this link between fiction and real life because, in reality, dramatic circumstances and the fear of loneliness often lead individuals toward self-discovery. The character of Britt-Marie demonstrates how social expectations can limit personal freedom and self-understanding.