

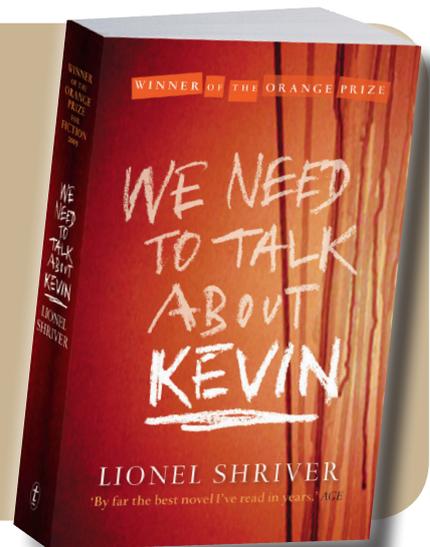
We Need to Talk about Kevin

Lionel Shriver

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Fiction, paperback



Praise

'Like *Eugenides' The Virgin Suicides*, Shriver's novel is assembled over the broken bodies of children, but it is less interested in the cause of tragedy than the architecture of it, less concerned with why tragedy strikes than in describing its contours.

What really matters is that Shriver has produced—through the voice of a fearsomely intelligent, self-absorbed and utterly bereft mother—a breathtaking work of art.' *Age*

'If you can read this novel and not be as moved as you are disturbed, you're not quite human.' *Sydney Morning Herald*

About Lionel Shriver

Lionel Shriver is the author of ten novels including *The Post-Birthday World*, *So Much for That*, *Game Control*, *Ordinary Decent Criminals*, *Checker and the Derailleurs* and *The Female of the Species*. She has also written for the *Guardian*, *Economist*, *Wall Street Journal* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. She lives in London.

We Need to Talk about Kevin won the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2005.

A reader's introduction to *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

Eva Khatchadourian's son, Kevin, murdered seven of his fellow high-school students, a cafeteria worker and a popular algebra teacher. Two tears later, in a series of letters to her absent husband, Eva recounts the story of how Kevin came to be Kevin.

Fearing that her own shortcomings may have shaped what her son became, she confesses to a deep, long-standing ambivalence about both motherhood in general and Kevin in particular. How much is her fault? When did it all start to go wrong?

Or was it, in fact, ever 'right' at all?

Questions for discussion

1. Was Kevin born wicked, or was his cold heart the inevitable consequence of an unaffectionate mother? Does the novel answer this question? And do you think the answer to this classic 'nature versus nurture' debate—whether character is formed by environment or is innate—has to be one or the other?
2. Do you trust Eva's version of events? More than once, she admits she was mistaken about something she assumed that Kevin did. Is she exaggerating her son's malignancy to make herself seem less blameworthy, or was she the only party in this story who foresaw what he was capable of?
3. Do you think that Kevin was guilty of damaging his little sister's eye? If so, what evidence do you find for this assumption? Would it stand up in court?
4. Franklin always looks on the bright side of parenthood, and interprets Kevin's action in the most favorable light possible. Do you find this eagerness to give his own child a break sympathetic? Or is Franklin a fool?
5. We're often most repelled by people who share our own flaws. Eva confesses that she never really liked her son. But what are some of the traits that Kevin and his mother have in common?
6. Why do people have children, when kids are expensive and exhausting, and the risks of something going wrong are so high?
7. While you were reading the novel, did you ever wonder what Franklin was doing, and why he never seemed to write back to Eva?
8. Eva was sued in civil court for being a negligent parent. Many school shooting incidents have resulted in similar suits. If you were the judge in that case, what ruling would you have handed down? Are there any other parties in this story who seem to you conspicuously remiss?



9. Does the novel truly explain why high school killings have become a social phenomenon in the United States? And did you want an explanation?
10. Is Eva a bad mother? Is she too hard on herself, or is she not hard enough?
11. What do you believe ultimately motivated Kevin to stage Thursday?