

I REMEMBER EVERYTHING

FIONA WILKES

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YEAR LEVEL: Y9–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Beginning in Bristol and moving to 1980s London, this novel follows Billie, a young queer woman, as she navigates the highs and lows of life, coming out as queer, and finding her chosen family, only to lose them again during the AIDS epidemic.

Thirty years on, Billie picks up her pen to celebrate the lives of these friends: quixotic Robert, Tolstoy the photographer, soft-spoken Eleanor, sweet-eyed Sasha, uncompromising Aggie, and Ted the dreamer. And, of course, Laura – the girl who has always captivated Billie, and the one person she can't live without.

This is a story of queer joy, queer tragedy, and the strength to love deeply.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

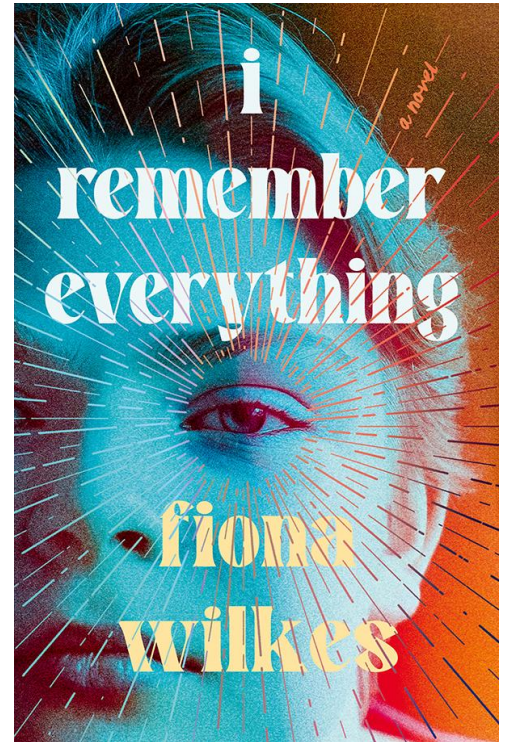
Fiona Wilkes is a writer, researcher and educator, specialising in English and Literary Studies. Her work has been published locally, nationally and internationally and has garnered attention from several literary prizes. Born in the United Kingdom, Fiona now lives and works in Perth, Western Australia, on unceded Whadjuk Noongar land. Her debut novel, *I Remember Everything*, was shortlisted for the 2024 City of Fremantle Hungerford Award.

THEMES

- LGBTQIA+ identities
- Coming out
- Queer history
- Feminism
- Family
- Diversity
- Gender and sexuality
- Religion
- Memory
- Grief/loss

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- Y9–10 English
- Y9–10 Humanities and social sciences



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion Questions – Before Reading

1. *I Remember Everything* is a first-person fiction novel. Predict how this point of view will help the reader feel connected to the characters and events.
2. Look closely at the cover for *I Remember Everything*. What do you see, and what top three themes do you think will be important based on the cover's stylistic choices (colour scheme, illustrations, fonts etc)?

Discussion Questions – During Reading

1. Compare and contrast the differences between Billie's various families (her mother and siblings, her university friend group, and her wife and son).
2. Create a mind map or character trading cards of Billie's found family.
3. How does Billie's father's death impact her life trajectory and decisions?
4. *I Remember Everything* is clear from the outset that it is a story about the AIDs epidemic (now an ongoing global pandemic). How does this influence the reader's connection to the characters, knowing that many of them may not survive?
5. Billie is in love with her best friend Laura. How is this literary trope utilised and challenged in *I Remember Everything*?
6. Billie's friend Valentine is murdered on New Years Eve. Research the real history of hate crimes against gender diverse and transgender people in 1980's UK.
7. Billie and her friends call AIDs 'It'. Why do they avoid naming the illness? And how does this contrast to the complicated history of identifying and naming HIV and AIDs?
8. Billie says, **'We extended our youth to the point of straining'** (p. 111). Why do you think that Billie and her friends live their life to the fullest, even after they should 'grow up' and become responsible adults?
9. Billie and her friends get tested after Eleanor finds out she is unwell. How does this scene help counteract one of the dominant 1980s HIV/AIDs narratives that you had to be a queer male, or one of the 4 H's (a homosexual male, heroin user, haemophiliac or Haitian), to catch the disease?
10. Aggie is upset with Billie writing about 'It' when she didn't experience 'It'. What are the arguments for Aggie's viewpoint?
11. Robert tells Billie, **'Someone needs to stick around and make sure that we're remembered'** (p. 208). Does Billie achieve this goal?

Discussion Questions – After Reading

1. Research the support that lesbian and queer women gave to the community during the AIDs epidemic.
2. How does the author juxtapose the uncertainty and fear around the HIV and AIDs epidemic of the 1980s versus the COVID-19 pandemic of the early 2020s?
3. Discuss the reliability and fallibility of memory. Use examples from *I Remember Everything* or your personal experience.
4. How might a different point of view lead to the telling of a different story?
5. The novel is split into three sections, excluding the prologue and epilogue: the best of times, the worst of times, and hard times. Why has the author chosen to echo Charles Dickens here? How does this structure inform the reader's framing of the events in each section?
6. What is the symbolism in relation to the novel of the lines (or rays) on the cover that are haloing out from around the figure's eye? Use examples from the novel to provide evidence for your answer. Consider how this also relates to the 'I' in the novel's title.



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