

READER'S GUIDE

1. Many of the stories in *The Doll's Alphabet* are set in uncertain time periods—they could be set in a version of the present day, the early twentieth century, a more general past, or a version of the future. What do these uncertain settings achieve? How does displacing readers in time change the way they experience the story?
2. Gender roles play a big part in these stories, particularly in “Waxy.” Do the confines of how men and women operate and relate to each other in *The Doll's Alphabet* offer ways for you to think about gender dynamics in the world we live in? How so?
3. Many stories in *The Doll's Alphabet* feature strong elements of dystopian fiction. Could these stories imagine a possible future, or perhaps an alternative past? Do they gesture toward a moral or a possible cause of their dystopian reality?
4. What do you make of the shortest story in the collection, the title story, “The Doll's Alphabet”?
5. *The Doll's Alphabet* has much in common with fairy tales and Franz Kafka, both in its oddness and its sly comedy. In such precarious circumstances, what role does a sense of humor play?

The Doll's Alphabet was inspired by:

- Edward Gorey, *Amphigorey Again*
- Barbara Comyns, *Sisters by a River*
- Georges Perec, *Life: A User's Manual*
- T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems & Plays*
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada, or Ardor*
- Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks Than Kicks*
- Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*
- Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*
- Günter Grass, *Cat and Mouse*