

KAY KERR

LOVE

'Beautiful, nuanced  
and joyful'  
SALLY HEPWORTH

'An important,  
heartfelt and  
generous book'  
CARLY FINDLAY

&

Five true  
stories about  
neurodivergent  
life and love

AUTISM

Reading Group Notes

# About the Book

*'Love has always intrigued me, in part because I have carried for a long time a feeling that I am doing love wrong.'*

**Michael** made a name for himself on the hit show *Love on the Spectrum*. After his televised first dating experiences, will he complete his quest to find his queen?

**Chloë** was always good at maths, with feelings 'too big' to be contained. When she reconnects with her childhood boyfriend, it must be fate.

**Noor** has had a lot on her plate from a young age, especially at home. People-pleasing becomes her survival mode, but Noor can't keep her struggles inside forever.

**Jess** has spent a lifetime being put into different boxes. Through her strong will and creativity, can she break out and build a life that is truly her own?

**Tim** is a non-speaking autistic man who has been underestimated all his life. But through willpower, technology and a mother's love, he has a chance of finding a different kind of voice.

**Through the intimate writing of critically acclaimed autistic author Kay Kerr, *Love & Autism* presents an uplifting celebration of neurodivergent love, the search for it and a deeper look into the lives of autistic Australians.**

# About the Author

Kay Kerr is an autistic author and journalist hoping to shift perspectives on autism and neurodiversity through her writing. Her debut novel *Please Don't Hug Me* (2020) was shortlisted for Book of the Year for Older Children at the Australian Book Industry Awards (ABIA) in 2021, and listed as a 'Notable Book' by the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA). Her second novel *Social Queue* (October 2021) was also a CBCA 'Notable Book', and was shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards.

Through her freelance work, Kay writes about autistic representation, disability, parenting, pop culture, gardening and feelings.

She lives on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, with her husband and daughter.

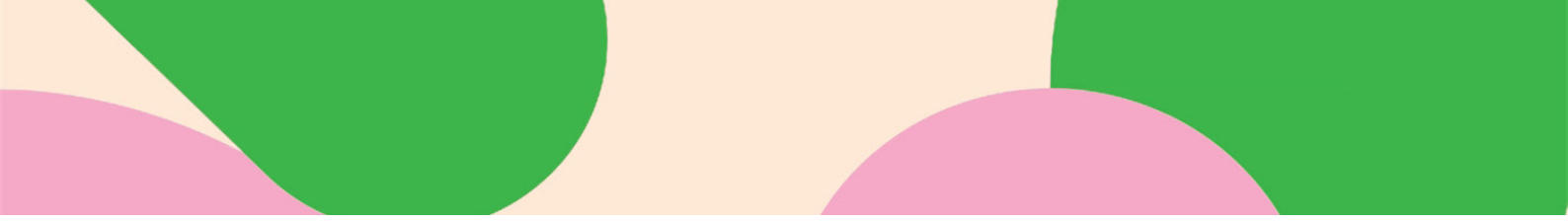
# Questions for Discussion

1. As Kerr says early on, love is ‘something we are supposed to *feel* more than learn. But it *is* learned, as those of us who struggle to get it right realise.’ (Page 11) How do you think about love – as something innate, or something learned? What media or examples did you learn from? How do the people in *Love & Autism* learn about love, romance and relationships?
2. Kerr explicitly discusses her language choices around autism in the book, for example around identity-first or person-first language and terms like ‘on the spectrum’ or ‘high/low functioning’. Why is language important when talking about neurodivergence and people’s varying experiences of autism?
3. How do the many voices in this book – from Michael, Chloë, Noor, Jess and Tim to autistic professionals and children – work together to portray autistic love? Were there any voices that surprised you? Were there any perspectives you wanted to hear more from?
4. What role does family play in forming the foundation for love in our lives? How does each person’s family shape their feelings towards themselves and future relationships?
5. School can be a place that supports or alienates neurodivergent people. What are some of the different experiences in this book? Are the challenges due to difficult individuals, or the education system itself? How is university different to primary or high school?
6. Friendship is a treasure, but it can sometimes be a minefield. Consider Michael and Briana’s friendship, or Chloë’s childhood wish for a ‘picture-perfect girl gang friendship group’ (Page 88). How do platonic relationships play out for the people in this book? What makes a fulfilling friendship possible?
7. The search for belonging is universal, and it can lead people to very different places. How do the people in this book find places to belong? What role can spaces like religion, online forums or fan conventions play in welcoming and including different people? How can they sometimes exclude neurodivergent people?
8. How do creativity and self-expression help autistic people explore different aspects of their identities or interact with the wider world? For example, Jess’s cosplay, or Noor’s writing.
9. Communication is a key part of any relationship. What kind of communication difficulties are present in these stories? How are they overcome? Think about Jess and



Jesslyn at the start of their relationship; Tim and his mum or teachers; or Noor and her husband.

10. What does an autism diagnosis mean to the different people in the book? Are there differences in being diagnosed as a child, or as an adult? How does it change the way people see themselves?
11. Kerr occasionally shares information about topics of interest to her interviewees in italics, almost an 'aside' – for example, about Yowie chocolates or the TV show *My Little Pony*. How does this reflect the way autistic people might share their stories? How does it affect your experience as a reader?
12. Autistic pride and community are important to many of the people in the book: in fact, Kerr dedicates the book to the autistic community. What are some ways that people show their pride in their identity, and share it with the world? Why is it important to do this? What examples are there of autistic people advocating for themselves, and for others?
13. Kerr corrects some common myths about autism, including the idea that autistic people aren't empathetic, or that screentime is innately bad for autistic people. How does she show that what might look like a problem often makes a lot of sense from an autistic perspective – upending the 'deficit' model of diagnosis? What does this say about the importance of sharing autistic stories from autistic people?
14. In these stories, how does autism intersect with other aspects of people's identity, e.g. race, gender, sexuality, parenthood? Is it always the most important part of people's life?
15. Noor and Kay reflect at length about being autistic parents of neurodivergent children. How does their own experience of neurodivergence impact their parenting style?
16. How do you think being autistic might change or affect someone's experience of love? What aspects might be stronger, or benefit? What aspects might look different from a neurotypical perspective?
17. In the conclusion, Kerr says: 'In speaking to Michael, Jess, Noor, Tim and Chloë, I have been reminded over and over again that there is no blueprint for successful love or a successful life.' (Page 297) How has each person in the book, including the author, charted their own path in life and love? Where might you imagine them going in the future?



18. What expectations of autism or autistic relationships did you have before reading this book? How have these expectations been changed, complicated, or supported by your reading?

**Please see ‘A comprehensive but incomplete reading list’ in *Love & Autism* for further non-fiction reading suggestions.**