

Recommended reads

Caroline Smailes recommends other books that you may enjoy:

Everything you Ever Wanted by Rosalind Wiseman
(Tonto Books)

The Edible Woman by Margaret Atwood
(Virago)

The PowerBook by Jeanette Winterson
(Vintage)

Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell
(Sceptre)

Lucky by Alice Sebold
(Picador)

Also written by Caroline Smailes

In Search of Adam published by The Friday Project.
[ISBN 978-1906321024, paperback]

Disraeli Avenue published by bluechrome Publishing.
[ISBN 978-1906061692, limited edition hardback]

Caroline Smailes

In September 2005, two weeks before she was due to start a PhD in Linguistics, Caroline Smailes watched an interview on Richard & Judy where they referred to someone as a 'nearly woman'. She identified with the label, thinking herself a 'nearly' writer. As a result, she gave up funding and a PhD place. A few weeks later she enrolled on an MA in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her first novel, *In Search of Adam*, was written during her study.

In brief:

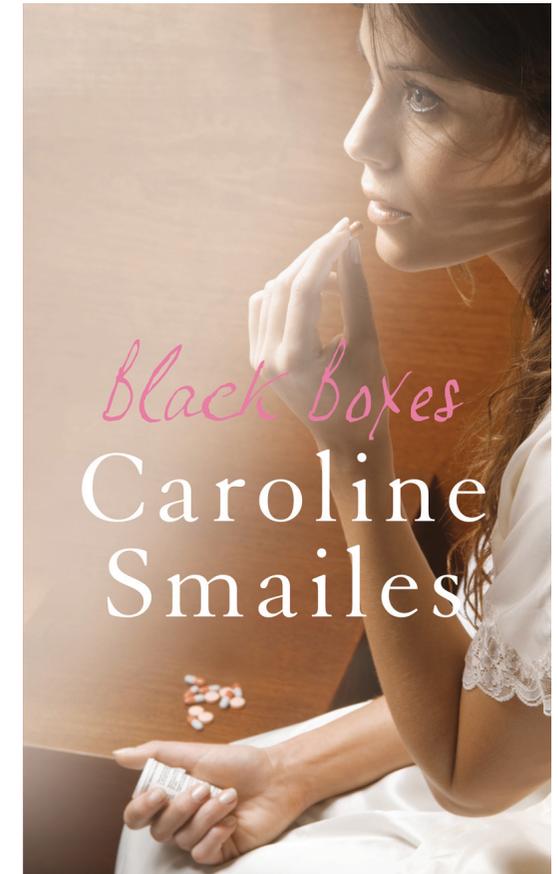
Caroline Smailes was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1973. She now lives on the Wirral with her husband and three children. Caroline Smailes appears to make life changing decisions based on passing comments made by Richard & Judy.

You can find out more about Caroline at www.carolinesmailes.co.uk

A READER'S GUIDE TO

BLACK BOXES

by Caroline Smailes



'Julie Myerson meets Ian McEwan in this gripping novel of family breakdown.'



Author introduction

I have always wanted to write.

I used to think that it was better to keep my dream secret. I thought that it was better not to voice my hope, not to open myself up and to have that wish ridiculed or criticised. Writing was my secret. I would fill diaries, create worlds, escape.

I used to think that it was better to protect myself, for my writing to be hush-hush, never shared, never open to comment.

I was wrong.

Caroline Smailes

Points for discussion

Black Boxes is a novel that weaves together the disturbing tale of a mother and daughter with the concept of an aircraft black box, recording their thoughts and memories. The purpose is to take the reader to the emotional heart of the story.

- At the beginning of the novel Ana casts Alex in the role of the ‘killer’. Do you feel that Alex is responsible for Ana’s death?
- Why do you feel that the author included finger sign language drawings within the text?
- Ana Lewis is a mother who fails her children. Is she a victim of undetected postnatal depression, an oppressive relationship or is she solely to blame for her inadequacies? Do you feel sympathy or anger towards her?
- To what extent does Alex’s mother contribute to the breakdown of Ana?
- Is place a vital component of the story?
- An earlier draft of *Black Boxes* was given the title *Blink*, consider the significance of blinking within the story.
- Davie’s voice is never heard, but it could be argued that his presence is felt within the novel as his actions are reported within Pip’s diary. How do you react to Davie?
- Ana Lewis casts herself as Rapunzel and her children as Hansel and Gretel. Can you link the twisted imagery within *Black Boxes* to that within these fairy tales?

- Do you feel that Pip will live happily ever after? Do you feel that *Black Boxes* is unremittingly dark or does the ending contain elements of hope?

Black Boxes is published by The Friday Project.

ISBN 978-1906321703, hardback [September 2008]

ISBN 978-1906321901, paperback [March 2009]

 HarperCollins
Publishers Ltd

