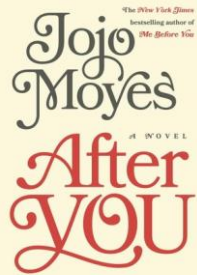




Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



After You

Jojo Moyes

About this Book

“You’re going to feel uncomfortable in your new world for a bit. But I hope you feel a bit exhilarated too. Live boldly. Push yourself. Do not settle. Just live well. Just live. Love, Will.”

How do you move on after losing the person you loved? How do you build a life worth living?

Louisa Clark is no longer just an ordinary girl living an ordinary life. After the transformative six months spent with Will Traynor, she is struggling without him. When an extraordinary accident forces Lou to return home to her family, she can’t help but feel she’s right back where she started.

Her body heals, but Lou herself knows that she needs to be kick-started back to life. Which is how she ends up in a church basement with the members of the Moving On support group, who share insights, laughter, frustrations, and terrible cookies. They will also lead her to the strong, capable Sam Fielding—the paramedic, whose business is life and death, and the one man who might be able to understand her. Then a figure from Will’s past appears and hijacks all her plans, propelling her into a very different future...

For Lou Clark, life after Will Traynor means learning to fall in love again, with all the risks that brings. But here Jojo Moyes gives us two families, as real as our own, whose joys and sorrows will touch you deeply, and where both changes and surprises await.

About the Author

Jojo Moyes is a British novelist. Moyes studied at Royal Holloway, University of London. She won a bursary financed by The Independent newspaper to study journalism at City University and subsequently worked for *The Independent* for 10 years. In 2001 she became a full-time novelist. Moyes' novel *Foreign Fruit* won the Romantic Novelists' Association (RNA) Romantic Novel of the Year in 2004. She is married to journalist Charles Arthur and has three children.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

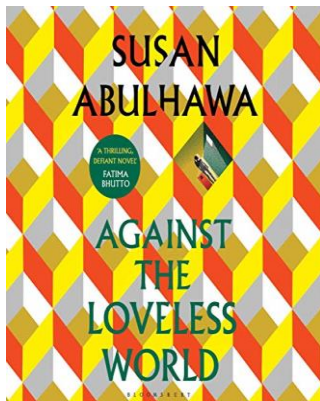
Discussion Questions

1. What is Louisa's emotional state at the start of this book? What has transpired for her between Will's death and now?
2. Lou's gig at the Shamrock and Clover is a great source of humor in the book. What other function does this particular job play in the book and how does it serve the story?
3. Lou worries that after her accident everyone thinks she's suicidal. How would you describe her mental state and her role in the fall? Is she responsible, and why or why not?
4. Throughout the book Lou and her loved ones question her life decisions, and if she is in fact "living" at all after Will's death. What is holding her back and what ultimately allows her to make changes?
5. Lou finds herself attracted to Sam, but she isn't always straightforward with him about her feelings. What keeps her from being intimate with him?
6. How are the Traynors dealing with their complex grief in different ways?
7. How does the Moving On Circle help Lou? What insights does she take away from her experience?
8. In Chapter 19, the point of view changes to Lily's perspective. Why does the author make this shift and how does it serve the overall plot of the book?
9. A running theme in the novel is about personal freedom and how Lou, Treena, and their mother all feel trapped by their respective situations. How do they learn from one another? How might they each benefit from having more freedom?
10. What does Lou learn from her relationship with Sam and how might these lessons serve her in her new life?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Against the Loveless World

Susan Abulhawa

About This Book

As Nahr sits, locked away in solitary confinement, she spends her days reflecting on the dramatic events that landed her in prison in a country she barely knows. Born in Kuwait in the 70s to Palestinian refugees, she dreamed of falling in love with the perfect man, raising children, and possibly opening her own beauty salon. Instead, the man she thinks she loves jilts her after a brief marriage, her family teeters on the brink of poverty, she's forced to prostitute herself, and the US invasion of Iraq makes her a refugee, as her parents had been. After trekking through another temporary home in Jordan, she lands in Palestine, where she finally makes a home, falls in love, and her destiny unfolds under Israeli occupation.

About The Author

Nahr, a political prisoner, is incarcerated in the harsh conditions of The Cube, a prison where time has ceased to have any meaning, in solitary confinement, where she narrates the life journey, the path she walked that led to her present predicament, her family, the countries she passed through.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

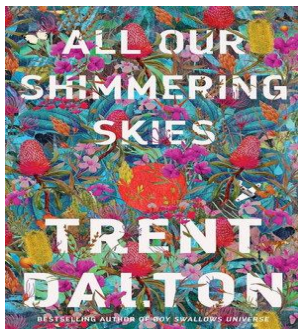
Discussion Questions

1. Did this book make you think about certain topics differently?
2. How would you describe this book to a stranger?
3. Did you finish the entire story?
4. Could you relate to the protagonist on any level?
5. What surprised most about this book?
6. Did you feel invested in this story?
7. What scenes stuck with you the most?
8. Would you consider reading another book in this subject?
9. What questions would you ask the author if you had the chance?
10. Is this genre/type of book your typical choice?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



All Our Shimmering Skies

Trent Dalton

About This Book

Darwin, 1942, and as Japanese bombs rain down, motherless Molly Hook, the gravedigger's daughter, turns once again to the sky for guidance. She carries a stone heart inside a duffel bag next to the map that leads to Long coat Bob, the deep-country sorcerer who put a curse on her family. By her side are the most unlikely travelling companions: Greta, a razor-tongued actress and Yukio, a fallen Japanese fighter pilot.

All Our Shimmering Skies is a story about gifts that fall from the sky, curses we dig from the earth and the secrets we bury inside ourselves. It is an odyssey of true love and grave danger, of darkness and light, of bones and blue skies; a buoyant, beautiful and magical novel a brim with warmth, wit and wonder; and a love letter to Australia and the art of looking up.

About the Author

Trent Dalton writes for The Weekend Australian Magazine. He is a two-time Walkley Award winner; three-time Kennedy Award winner for excellence in NSW journalism and a four-time winner of the national News Awards Features Journalist of the Year.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

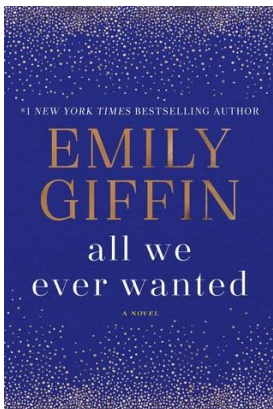
Discussion Questions

1. Have there been times in your life when you have spoken to the sky?
2. What do you think is the real treasure that Molly escapes into the forest to find?
3. Why do you think Greta Maze chooses to join Molly on her quest?
4. What do you think happened to Molly's mother, Violet Hook?
5. The central theme to the story is "own all you carry, carry all you own". In what ways could this message apply to your life in 2020 and, moreover, the story of Australia?
6. What role does death and where we go when we die figure in the narrative?
7. Do you believe there is magic to be found in the living world? Not just fantasy, but in the things, we normally explain through science?
8. Dalton has said the story is one big metaphor for his life growing up on the fringes of Brisbane in the early 1990s. Did you find thematic similarities between All Our Shimmering Skies and Dalton's semi auto biographical debut, Boy Swallows Universe?
9. What do you think happens to Molly and Greta beyond the end of this story?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



All We Ever Wanted

Emily Giffin

About this Book

The thrilling novel from the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *First Comes Love* raises the daunting question: In the midst of a scandal that threatens a perfect life, how far are you willing to go to protect the ones you love?

About the Author

Emily Giffin is a graduate of Wake Forest University and the University of Virginia School of Law. After practicing litigation at a Manhattan firm for several years, she moved to London to write full time. The author of seven New York Times bestselling novels, *The One & Only*, *Something Borrowed*, *Something Blue*, *Baby Proof*, *Love The One You're With*, *Heart of the Matter*, and *Where We Belong*, she lives in Atlanta with her husband and three children.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

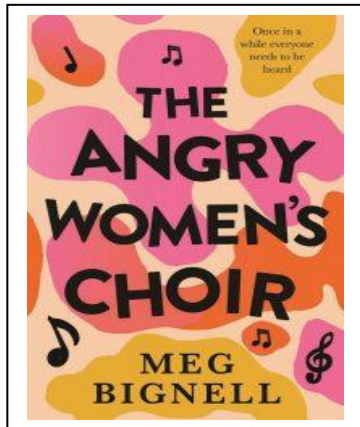
Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the title, "All We Ever Wanted." How do you think it relates to the overall story? How does it apply to each of the characters in the book?
2. Both Nina and Kirk have very different ideas about what the "right path" is for Finch. How do you think each parent justifies their actions?
3. Tom is furious about the transgression against his daughter, and believes she deserves justice. How do Tom's responsibilities as a parent come into conflict with the ethics of respecting Lyla's wishes?
4. As the book progresses, Nina finds herself siding with Tom's values rather than her husband's. Do you feel that Nina is betraying her family by aligning with Tom? Is she betraying herself if she does not stick to her beliefs? Whom does she owe her loyalty to more?
5. In chapter 11, Melanie tells Nina that it's a mother's responsibility to stand by her child "no matter what." Do you agree with this assertion?
6. Why do you think Lyla is so willing to trust and even begin dating Finch? As you were reading, did you believe Finch's claim that Polly stole his phone and took the picture of Lyla? If so, was there a point at which you began to doubt Finch?
7. Discuss the ways in which Tom's and Nina's pasts inform the way they live their lives in the present. Do you believe they were/are living their best lives?
8. This book poses the question of what lengths one should go to in order to protect one's family versus preserve one's values. What would you have done in Nina's position? In Tom's?
9. In the epilogue, Lyla tells Finch that Nina "saved" them both. What do you think she means? Do you believe this is an accurate statement?
10. If you could write subsequent chapters for this book, how do you imagine the relationship between Tom, Nina, Lyla, Finch and Kirk playing out?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Angry Women's Choir

Meg Bignell

About This Book

Once in a while, everyone needs to be heard. Freycinet Barnes has built herself the perfect existence. With beautiful children, a successful husband and a well-ordered schedule, it's a life so full she simply doesn't fit. When she steps outside her calendar and is accidentally thrown into the generous bosom of the West Moonah Women's Choir, she finds music, laughter, friendship and a hummin wellspring of rage. With the ready acceptance of the colourful choristers, Frey learns that voices can move mountains, fury can be kind and life can do with a bit of ruining. Together, Frey and the choir sing their anger, they breathe it in and stitch it up, belt it out and spin it into a fierce, driving beat that will kick the system square in the balls, and possibly demolish them all.

About The Author

Meg Bignell was a nurse and a weather presenter on the telly before she surrendered to a persistent desire to write. Since then she has been writing almost every day – bits and pieces here and there, either to earn a crust, to get something off her chest or to entertain herself. She has written three short films, mostly because she wanted to do some acting and no one else would cast her. She sings a bit too, occasionally writes and performs cabaret, but is mostly very busy being a mother to three and a wife (to one). She lives with her family on a dairy farm on Tasmania's East Coast.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?
2. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
3. Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? Do they learn something about themselves and how the world works?
4. Is the plot engaging—does the story interest you? Is this a plot-driven book: a fast-paced page-turner? Or does the story unfold slowly with a focus on character development? Were you surprised by the plot's complications? Or did you find it predictable, even formulaic?
5. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?
6. What surprised you the most about the book?
7. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?
8. Contrast this book with others you have read, for example, books by the same author, with a similar theme, or set in the same time period.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



An Anonymous Girl

Greer Hendricks

About this Book

When Jessica Farris signs up for a psychology study conducted by the mysterious Dr. Shields, she thinks all she'll have to do is answer a few questions, collect her money, and leave.

But as the questions grow more and more intense and invasive and the sessions become outings where Jess is told what to wear and how to act, she begins to feel as though Dr. Shields may know what she's thinking... and what she's hiding.

About the Author

Greer Hendricks and Sarah Pekkanen are the co-authors of the blockbuster New York Times bestseller, *THE WIFE BETWEEN US*, as well as the forthcoming, *AN ANONYMOUS GIRL*. *AN ANONYMOUS GIRL* has been optioned for a television series by eOne, with Sarah and Greer executive producing. *THE WIFE BETWEEN US* has been optioned for film by Amblin Entertainment, with Sarah and Greer screenwriting the adaptation.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

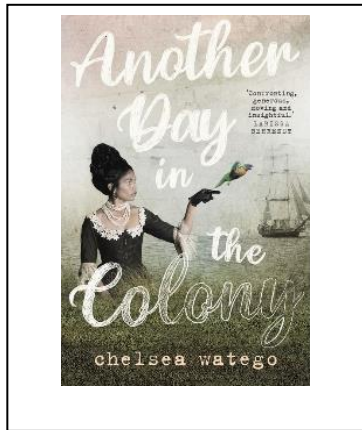
TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

- 1 When the book begins, we learn that Jess is a makeup artist in NYC. She says that her job is to create transformations but it's only a temporary fix and people will revert to their former selves. What do you think she meant by this? Why do you think she chose to work in that field?
- 2 Why did Jess decided to participate in the study initially? Would you participate in a study like this? Why or why not?
- 3 The story is told in the first-person perspective of Jess and the second person for Dr. Shields. What did you think about this writing style? How did it help build suspense?
- 4 Jess tells her parents she's still involved with doing makeup for Broadway shows when in reality she's a freelance artist who does make up for 'random' people—going on a night out or celebrating an anniversary. Why did Jess hide the truth from her parents? What was she afraid of?
- 5 Why do you think Jess felt this way? Do you think Jess would have given different answers if she would have known all along that Dr. Shields was a woman? Do you think women are conditioned to care more about what other women think of them compared to a male's option of them?
- 6 Dr. Shields starts to manipulate Jess by paying her a large sum of money for the sessions and buying her gifts. Are you surprised she didn't ask more questions about Dr. Shields's study or do you think she was blinded by the money and attention? Why do you think she felt comfortable enough to tell Dr. Shields's about what really happened to her sister Becky?
- 7 We learn more about the dynamic between Dr. Shields's and her husband Thomas. She reveals that he was unfaithful to her and they are somewhat estranged. What did you think Dr. Shields's motivations? Did that change at all as the story went on?
- 8 Part Two begins with Dr. Shields tasking Jess to flirt with a man at a hotel lobby. Why do you think Jess went through with it?



Book Club Reading Notes



Another Day in the Colony

Chelsea Watego

About This Book

Chelsea Watego examines the ongoing and daily racism faced by First Nations peoples in so-called Australia. Rather than offer yet another account of 'the Aboriginal problem', she theorises a strategy for living in a social world that has only ever imagined Indigenous peoples as destined to die out. Drawing on her own experiences and observations of the operations of the colony, she exposes the lies that settlers tell about Indigenous people. In refusing such stories, Chelsea tells her own- fierce, personal, sometimes funny, sometimes anguished. She speaks not of fighting back but of standing her ground against colonialism in academia, in court, and in media. It's a stance that takes its toll on relationships, career prospects, and even the body.

About The Author

Chelsea Watego, a Munanjahli and South Sea Islander woman, boasts over 20 years in Indigenous health as a worker and researcher. Currently a Professor at QUT, she focuses on the impact of race on health inequalities. Her ARC Discovery Grant aims to establish an Indigenist Health Humanities field, prioritizing Indigenous survival and intellectual sovereignty. A prolific writer, she contributes to IndigenousX, NITV, The Guardian, and The Conversation. Involved in community development and collaborative race research, Chelsea co-hosted the Wild Black Women show. A mother of five, her debut book, "Another Day in the Colony," released in November 2021, received critical acclaim.

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

 [Citylibraries Townsville](#)

 [townsvillelib](#)

Discussion Questions

1. How does Chelsea Watego's background in health influence the themes and perspectives presented in "Another Day in the Colony"?
2. In what ways does Watego engage with the works of other influential women, such as Jackie Huggins, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, in her debut book?
3. Explore the significance of the title, "Another Day in the Colony," and how it reflects the book's central themes.
4. Watego critiques the concept of hope as complacency and advocates for "the emancipatory possibility of not caring." What are your thoughts on this perspective, and how does it challenge traditional notions of hope?
5. Discuss the idea that the book is not written for white people. How does this intentional audience impact the narrative and the power dynamics within the discourse?
6. The concept of assuming power and joy as possible for First Nations people challenges conventional narratives of marginalization. How does Watego argue for the existence of power and joy in Indigenous communities?
7. Reflect on the chapter titled "Rejecting Hope" and its exploration of divesting from hope without giving up. How does Watego distinguish between giving up and embracing the idea that joy and sovereignty may not exist currently?
8. Explore the notion of "Unmitigated Blackness" and its connection to embodied sovereignty. How does Watego use this concept to express a sense of freedom and strength?
9. Consider the critique of white supremacy and the idea that whiteness is perceived as neutral. How does this concept inform the allocation of resources to First Nations "portfolios," and what implications does it have for Indigenous communities?
10. The book delves into the concept of cultural amnesia and the white supremacist longing for a homeland. How does this narrative of forgetting and longing shape the relationship between Indigenous and settler-colonial societies?

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

 Citylibraries Townsville

 townsvillelib

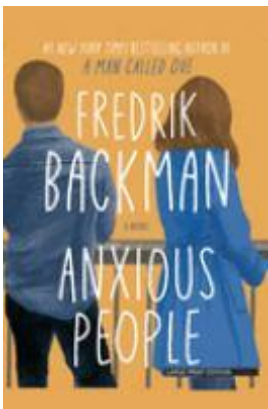


Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes

Anxious People

Fredrik Backman



About This Book

Taken hostage by a failed bank robber while attending an open house, eight anxiety-prone strangers—including a redemption-seeking bank director, two couples who would fix their marriages, and a plucky octogenarian—discover their unexpected common traits. Viewing an apartment normally doesn't turn into a life-or-death situation, but this particular open house becomes just that: a failed bank robber bursts in and takes everyone in the apartment hostage. As police surround the premises and television channels broadcast the hostage situation live, the eight strangers begin opening up to one another. Before long, the robber must decide which is the more terrifying prospect: going out to face the police, or staying in the apartment with this group of impossible people.

About The Author

Fredrik Backman is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *A Man Called Ove* (soon to be a major motion picture starring Tom Hanks), as well as two novellas, *And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer* and *The Deal of a Lifetime*. *Things My Son Needs to Know About the World*, his first work of non-fiction, will be released in the US in May 2019. His books are published in more than forty countries. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two children.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. The book starts off with Fredrik writing that this is a book about idiots. And that while it's easy to declare that other people are idiots, it's also true how difficult being a human is. Let's talk about what he's saying here about human nature. When you see the word 'idiot' what's the first thing that comes to mind?
2. This story becomes one about a hostage drama. Why do you think the 'bank robber' decided to try to rob a bank? What does that say about desperation and also just having a really bad idea?
3. The story is told in a nonlinear way and while we have the hostage storyline there's also one about a bridge and a tragedy that happened there. Let's talk about how the bridge storyline connected with the hostage one.
4. We follow the father/son policemen duo: Jim and Jack. What did you think about their dynamic and relationship?
5. Jack tried to save the man from jumping off the bridge but the man still jumped. He did end up saving a girl – who we meet much later as the psychologist Nadia. Let's talk about how the bridge impacted Jack's life and career choices going forward. What did you think about the scene where Jack and Nadia meet again?
6. Which character storyline were you the most engaged with in this story?
7. Throughout the novel, we learn about Jack's mother who passed away and his sister who is addicted to drugs. How did that factor into why Jim let the bank robber go free? Were you surprised when Jack ended up agreeing with his father in the end and letting her be?
8. At the end of the story, Fredrik writes that this story is about many different things but most of all about idiots. And how we're doing the best we can. Let's talk about this. What do you think are some of the key takeaways from the story?
9. The people held hostage are all as different as can be in so many ways. But yet, there are some similarities, especially when it comes to grief, fear and loneliness. Let's discuss how each of them are searching for some type of rescue.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Ask Again, Yes

Mary Beth Keane

About this Book

Ask Again, Yes is a deeply affecting exploration of the lifelong friendship and love that blossoms between Francis and Lena's daughter, Kate, and Brian and Anne's son, Peter. Luminous, heartbreaking, and redemptive, Ask Again, Yes reveals the way childhood memories change when viewed from the distance of adulthood—villains lose their menace and those who appeared innocent seem less so. Kate and Peter's love story, while tested by echoes from the past, is marked by tenderness, generosity, and grace.

About the Author

Mary Beth Keane's first novel, *The Walking People* (2009) was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award, and her second novel, *Fever* (2013) was named a best book of 2013 by NPR Books, Library Journal, and The San Francisco Chronicle. In 2011 she was named to the National Book Foundation's "5 under 35." She was a 2015 Guggenheim Fellow in Fiction and her new novel, *Ask Again, Yes*, is forthcoming in June of 2019.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

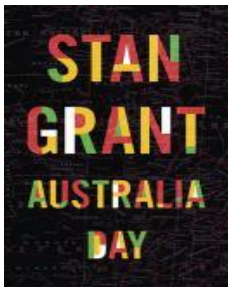
Discussion Questions

1. This novel has been described as a “Domestic” novel. Do you feel that’s the right genre for this novel? Why or why not?
2. Ask Again, Yes is told from the perspective of many different characters (Kate, Peter, Francis etc.). How do you think this adds to the development of the story?
3. The title Ask Again, Yes references the discussion Kate and Peter have at the end of the book. Do you feel that it applies to any other characters?
4. How are mental health and addiction issues portrayed in the novel? Do the characters’ experiences differ due to the era they grow up in?
5. Who do you think is the most sympathetic character in the book? Who is the least likable?
6. When Francis discovers Anne at Peter and Kate’s house, are you surprised at how calm he is? Or is this in line with his character?
7. The theme of history repeating itself is central to this novel. Which characters most fall into these patterns? Are there characters that don’t?
8. Kate, Lena, and Anne are very different women. How is the role of the traditional wife and mother portrayed in this novel?
9. The shooting changes the lives of almost everyone in the novel. How different do you think the following relationships would have been had it never happened? i) Kate and Peter ii) Lena and Francis iii) Anne and Brian.
10. What do you think the future holds for Kate and Peter?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Australia Day

Stan Grant

About This Book

As uncomfortable as it is, we need to reckon with our history. On January 26, no Australian can really look away. There are the hard questions we ask of ourselves on Australia Day. Since publishing his critically acclaimed, Walkley Award-winning, bestselling memoir *Talking to My Country* in early 2016, Stan Grant has been crossing the country, talking to huge crowds everywhere about how racism is at the heart of our history and the Australian dream. But Stan knows this is not where the story ends. In this book, *Australia Day*, his long-awaited follow up to *Talking to My Country*, Stan talks about reconciliation and the indigenous struggle for belonging and identity in Australia, and about what it means to be Australian. A sad, wise, beautiful, reflective and troubled book, *Australia Day* asks the questions that must be asked, that no one else seems to be asking. Who are we? What is our country? How do we move forward from here?

About the Author

Stan Grant is a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi man. A journalist since 1987, he has worked for the ABC, SBS, the Seven Network and Sky News Australia. From 2001 to 2012 he worked for CNN as an anchor and senior correspondent in Asia and the Middle East.

As a journalist, he has received a string of prestigious international and Australian awards. In 2015, he published his bestselling book *Talking to My Country*, which won the Walkley Book Award, and he also won a Walkley Award for his coverage of Indigenous affairs. In 2016 he was appointed to the Referendum Council on Indigenous recognition. Stan is now Professor of Global Affairs at Griffith University and International Affairs Analyst at ABC.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

Discussion Questions

1. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?
2. Has this book changed you—broadened your perspective?
3. Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas?
4. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"?
5. How did you feel reading it?
6. What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?
7. Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Authenticity Project

Clare Pooley

About This Book

"A story about a solitary green notebook that brings together six strangers and leads to unexpected friendship, and even love.

Everybody lies about their lives. What would happen if you shared the truth?" This is the question that Julian Jessop, an eccentric, seventy-nine-year-old artist, poses within a pale green exercise book that he labels The Authenticity Project, before leaving it behind in Monica's Café. When Monica discovers Julian's abandoned notebook, not only does she add her own story to the book, but she is also determined to find a way to help Julian feel less lonely.

With a cast of characters who are by turns quirky and funny, heartbreakingly sad and painfully true-to-life, The Authenticity Project is a novel a reader will take to their hearts and read with unabashed pleasure.

About the Author

Clare Pooley graduated from Cambridge University, and then spent twenty years in the heady world of advertising before becoming a full-time writer. Pooley lives in Fulham, London with her husband, three children and two border terriers.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

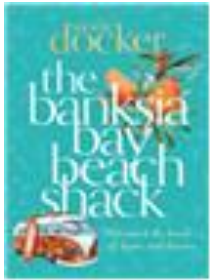
Discussion Questions

1. Julian writes, "Everyone lies about their lives." Is this true? Do you?
2. Julian calls his notebook "The Authenticity Project." Do you think people are increasingly searching for authenticity in today's world? If so, why? How do they go about it? How do you?
3. We are all connected via huge social media communities, but increased online interaction often comes at the expense of the type of local, real-life community provided by Monica's Cafe and Julian's Supper Club. What do these communities give us that virtual ones do not?
4. Most of the characters in the book are lonely, but in very different ways. What are the various forms of loneliness explored in The Authenticity Project?
5. The story is told from the perspectives of six main characters. Who did you relate to the most, and why? Which character is least like yourself?
6. Baz keeps the truth from his grandmother in order to spare her feelings. Julian avoids the truth to protect himself. Are there times when admitting the truth is not the right thing to do? Explain.
7. We all make snap judgements about each other, and often they are wrong. What incorrect assumptions do The Authenticity Project characters make about each other, and what are the consequences?
8. There is a scene in the book where Monica and Alice first see each other through the café window, and both want what the other has. What does The Authenticity Project teach us about envy?
9. Riley is the only character in the novel who does not have an obvious fatal flaw. Does this make him more loveable, or less? How does Riley act as a touchstone for the other characters?
10. If you found "The Authenticity Project," what truth would you tell?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Banksia Bay Beach Shack

Sandy Docker

About This Book

A year is a long time in the memory of a small town. Stories get twisted, truths become warped, history is rewritten.

MYSTERIES

When Laura discovers an old photo of her grandmother, Lillian, with an intriguing inscription on the back, she heads to the sleepy seaside town of Banksia Bay to learn the truth of Lillian's past. But when she arrives, Laura finds a community where everyone seems to be hiding something.

SECRETS

Virginia, owner of the iconic Beach Shack café, has kept her past buried for sixty years. As Laura slowly uncovers the tragic fragments of that summer so long ago, Virginia must decide whether to hold on to her secrets or set the truth free.

LIES

Young Gigi and Lily come from different worlds but forge an unbreakable bond – the 'Sisters of Summer'. But in 1961 a chain of events is set off that reaches far into the future. One lie told. One lie to set someone free. One lie that changes the course of so many lives.

Welcome to the Banksia Bay Beach Shack, where first love is found, and last chances are taken.

About the Author

Sandie Docker grew up in Coffs Harbour, and first fell in love with reading when her father introduced her to fantasy books as a teenager. Her love of fiction began when she first read Jane Austen for the HSC, but it wasn't until she was taking a translation course at university that her Mandarin lecturer suggested she might have a knack for writing.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

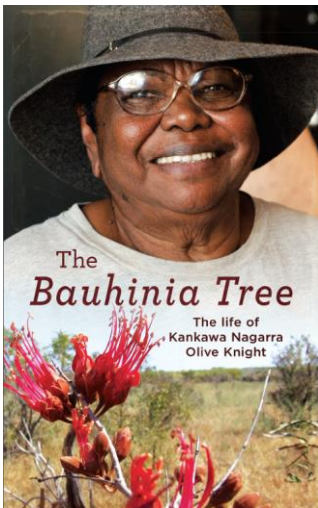
Discussion Questions

1. Gigi and Lily form a very strong bond, despite their differences in upbringing. What is it that draws them together?
2. What is Lily's motivation for trying to push Todd and Gigi together?
3. Gigi does not tell Lily the truth about the night on the beach with Richard. Do you understand her motivation? How would life have been different for Gigi and Lily and Costas if she had?
4. Yvonne shows incredible loyalty to Virginia. Where does this loyalty come from? Is it justified?
5. How does prejudice influence the events in The Banksia Bay Beach Shack and the characters' behaviour?
6. Discuss the ways in which the events of the novel are indicative of the era. How might things play out differently today?
7. 'Where there's breath, there's hope.' Discuss the importance of hope for both Gigi and Heath.
8. Laura applies her rules of journalism to her time in Banksia Bay. Do you think the rules help her, or hinder her in her search for the truth?
9. Heath is worried his condition will change the way Laura feels about him. Is it ever right to keep something from someone you care about?
10. 'Maybe the truth wasn't just the first casualty of war. Perhaps it was the first casualty of life.' What does this statement mean?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Bauhinia Tree

Nagarra Olive Knight

About this Book and the Author

With deep roots in the Kimberley region, Olive Knight shares her story of growing up with the Gooniyandi and Walmatjarri peoples of north-western Australia. As her father was of mixed blood, she was nearly killed on the day of her birth, as was customary for such children in her community. Thankfully, she was spared by an elder, and would follow her own path, full of hardship as she moved from mission to mission. She eventually found love and fulfilment, following her late husband Jim Bieundurry's passion for rights, becoming a respected translator and community leader. After Jim's death, Olive's singing and song writing opened unexpected worlds of opportunity. From early days in mission gospel choirs to finding her true voice in the country and western, and blues music of the day, Olive's talent as a singer eventually led to collaborations with other artists and performers, many of whom sought her unique voice and ability to translate songs into her traditional language. In 2011, Olive was invited to sing as part of Hugh Jackman's *Back on Broadway* production and has continued to perform with him across the world.

Olive's spirit and compassion continue to inspire as she speaks openly about the challenges of adopting young children in her mature years, and how she hopes to bring greater awareness and prevention efforts about substance abuse, particularly foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, within Aboriginal communities in Australia. Olive's devotion to the preservation and sharing of Aboriginal language and culture, and her love of music and poetry, shine in this remarkable memoir.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

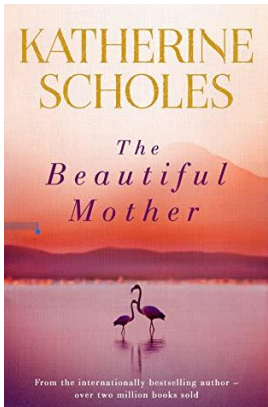
Discussion Questions

1. If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ... What observations are made in the book?
 - Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
 - Does the author criticize or admire the culture? Does he/she wish to preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained?
 - What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?
2. What is the central idea discussed in the book? What issues or ideas does the author explore? Are they personal, sociological, global, political, economic, spiritual, medical, or scientific?
3. Do the issues affect your life? How so - directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?
4. What evidence does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?
5. What kind of language does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?
6. What are the implications for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?
7. What solutions does the author propose? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?
8. How controversial are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?
9. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
10. What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Beautiful Mother

Katherine Scholes

About This Book

In a remote corner of Tanzania, Essie Lawrence lives with her husband in an archaeologist's camp. One morning a chance encounter with two strangers sees her making a rash promise. When she returns home to the research base, she has a baby in her arms. Essie is to care for the little girl until the coming of the rains. And then hand her back.

An exquisite and heart-piercing story of one woman's bond with a baby, *The Beautiful Mother* will resonate with every parent, crossing time, place and culture. It is an unforgettable exploration of what it really means to be a member of the human family, revealing the deep need we all have to find our own tribe.

About the Author

Katherine Scholes was born in Tanzania, East Africa, the daughter of a missionary doctor and an artist. She has fond memories of travelling with her parents and siblings on long safaris to remote areas where her father operated a clinic from his Land Rover. When she was ten, the family left Tanzania, going first to England and then settling in Tasmania. As an adult, Katherine moved to Melbourne with her film-maker husband. After working there for many years, writing books and making films, they returned with their two sons to live in Tasmania.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

Discussion Questions

1. Did Essie have any real choice when she was handed the baby by Nandamara?
2. Ian becomes frustrated to see his wife acting in unfamiliar ways, yet in his work he believes that 'change is the only constant'. In what ways does change come to affect their marriage?
3. Do you understand Julia's decision to live the rest of her life in Magadi, 'the heart of their agony', where the closest thing to happiness was a day of good, hard work and the satisfaction of seeing the camp run smoothly?
4. Simon believes himself to be a 'modern Tanzanian'. In what ways is this so? What has he rejected of his Hadza past, and what does he reclaim?
5. Carl travels the world taking photographs but still feels a pull back to a single place he calls 'home'. Discuss the notion of home as it is explored in the novel.
6. In a world where our extended families may not be all that close, emotionally or physically, how do we find 'our tribe'?
7. What makes someone a mother?
8. Do you agree with Kisani's statement: 'The past had to be left behind, so that something new could begin.'?
9. The Masaai women tell Essie, 'You are her mother at this moment. The future is another time.' What do you think this means?
10. At the conclusion of the novel, Essie says 'though it hurt so much, what had taken place was the best possible ending for the story'. Do you agree?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes

Becoming

Michelle Obama



About This Book

An intimate, powerful, and inspiring memoir by the former First Lady of the United States. In a life filled with meaning and accomplishment, Michelle Obama has emerged as one of the most iconic and compelling women of our era. As First Lady of the United States of America—the first African-American to serve in that role—she helped create the most welcoming and inclusive White House in history, while also establishing herself as a powerful advocate for women and girls in the U.S. and around the world whilst dramatically changing the ways that families pursue healthier and more active lives. In her memoir, a work of deep reflection and mesmerizing storytelling, she invites readers into her world, chronicling the experiences that have shaped her—from her childhood on the South Side of Chicago to her years as an executive balancing the demands of motherhood and work, to her time spent at the world's most famous address. With unerring honesty and lively wit, she describes her triumphs and her disappointments, both public and private, telling her full story as she has lived it—in her own words and on her own terms.

About The Author

AUTHOR OF #1 NATIONAL BESTSELLER AMERICAN GROWN

Michelle Obama served as First Lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017. A graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, Mrs. Obama started her career as an attorney at the Chicago law firm Sidley & Austin. She later worked in the Chicago mayor's office, at the University of Chicago, and at the University of Chicago Medical Center. The Obamas currently live in Washington, D.C., and have two daughters, Malia and Sasha.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News



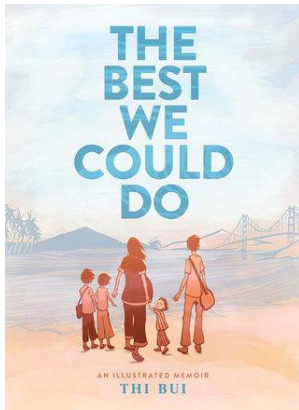
Discussion Questions

1. How much did you know about Michelle Obama's history before reading her memoir? What details surprised you?
2. Despite being one of the most famous and influential women in modern history, many readers have expressed how relatable they have found the First Lady's life. Did you feel this way? Why or why not?
3. How did Michelle Obama's upbringing on the South Side of Chicago influence her identity when she attended Princeton? How would you characterize her relationship with her parents before and during these formative years?
4. In what ways is the Obamas' marriage just like any other marriage? In what ways is it different?
5. Who were some of Obama's mentors — and why?
6. How did Obama feel about her husband's political career and politics in general? Were you surprised by her comments regarding politics?
7. What is Obama's relationship like with her daughters? In what ways is her approach to parenting similar to her mother's parenting? In what ways is it different?
8. Why did Michelle Obama make a choice to go into public service? Why do you think people who knew her were surprised by her change in career path?
9. What does the title, *Becoming*, mean to you?
10. Having read Obama's memoir, and knowing more about her life from her perspective, what do you think her legacy will be? What do you think she'd like her legacy to be?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Best We Could Do

Thi Bui

About this Book

At the heart of Bui's story is a universal struggle: While adjusting to life as a first-time mother, she ultimately discovers what it means to be a parent—the endless sacrifices, the unnoticed gestures, and the depths of unspoken love. Despite how impossible it seems to take on the simultaneous roles of both parent and child, Bui pushes through. With haunting, poetic writing and breathtaking art, she examines the strength of family, the importance of identity, and the meaning of home.

About the Author

Thi Bui was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the United States as a child. She studied art and law and thought about becoming a civil rights lawyer but became a public-school teacher instead. Bui lives in Berkeley, California, with her son, her husband, and her mother. *The Best We Could Do* is her debut graphic novel.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

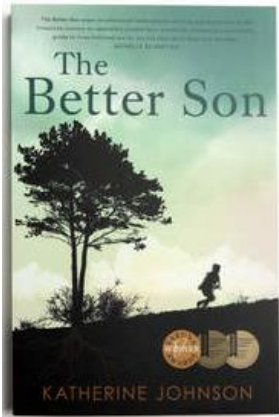
Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why? Did you find yourself amused, intrigued, enthralled, disturbed, fearful, irritated, angered, or impatient?
2. Which characters do you admire or dislike and why? What are their primary characteristics; how would you describe them?
3. What motivates the actions of a given character? To what degree does the character's past play a role in her present actions? Are those actions justified or ethical?
4. Do any characters grow or change over the course of the novel?
5. Is the story well developed?
6. What central ideas might the author be exploring-the novel's themes? Consider ideas about the nature of love, the requirements of goodness, the meaning of justice, the burden of the past...basic human issues that are at stake in the book.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Better Son

Katherine Johnson

About this Book

1952. Tasmania. The green, rolling hills of the dairy town Mole Creek have a dark underside, a labyrinthine underworld of tunnels that stretch for countless miles, caverns the size of cathedrals and underground rivers that flood after heavy rain. The caves are dangerous places, forbidden to children. But this is Tasmania, an island at the end of the earth. Here, rules are made to be broken. For two young brothers, a hidden cave a short walk from the family farm seems the perfect escape from their abusive, shell-shocked father until the older brother goes missing. Fearful of his father, nine-year-old Kip lies about what happened. It is a decision that will haunt him for the rest of his life. Fifty years later, Kip now an award-winning scientist has a young son of his own, but cannot look at him without seeing his lost brother, Tommy. On a mission of atonement, he returns to the cave they called Kubla to discover if it's ever too late to set things right. To have a second chance. To be the father he never had. *The Better Son* is a richly imaginative and universal story about the danger of secrets, the beauty in forgiveness and the enthralling power of Tasmania's unique natural landscapes.

About the Author

Katherine Johnson was born in Brisbane, Australia, in 1971. She has a Bachelor of Arts (Journalism) and holds an honours degree in marine science. Katherine now lives in Tasmania where she has worked as a science journalist and lives on a clifftop at the edge of the bush with her husband and two children. Her non-fiction articles have been published internationally.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

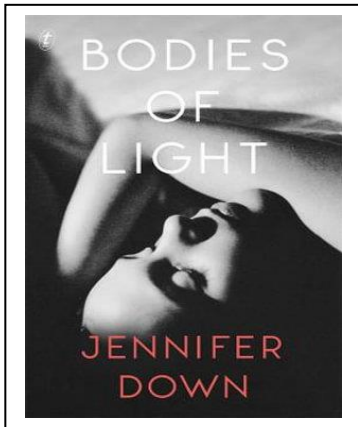
Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why? Did you find yourself amused, intrigued, enthralled, disturbed, fearful, irritated, angered, or impatient?
2. Which characters do you admire or dislike and why? What are their primary characteristics; how would you describe them?
3. What motivates the actions of a given character? To what degree does the character's past play a role in her present actions? Are those actions justified or ethical?
4. Do any characters grow or change over the course of the novel?
5. Is the story well developed?
6. What central ideas might the author be exploring-the novel's themes? Consider ideas about the nature of love, the requirements of goodness, the meaning of justice, the burden of the past...basic human issues that are at stake in the book.
7. Is the novel plot-driven? In other words, does the plot unfold quickly, focusing more on action than on the inner lives of the characters? Which do you prefer?
8. Is the plot well developed? Is it believable...or is it forced? Is it suspenseful or more contemplative? Does it unfold naturally, or do you feel manipulated along the way by coincidences, odd plot twists, or cliff-hangers?
9. Is the ending satisfying? Predictable or not? Does it wrap up the ends neatly? Is it too neat, too pat? Does it leave some issues unresolved, questions unanswered? If you could change the ending, would you...if so, how would you change it?
10. What central ideas might the author be exploring-the novel's themes? Consider ideas about the nature of love, the requirements of goodness, the meaning of justice, the burden of the past...basic human issues that are at stake in the book.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Bodies of Light

Jennifer Down

About This Book

So, by the grace of a photograph that had inexplicably gone viral, Tony had found me. Or- he had found Maggie. I had no way of knowing whether he was nuts or not, whether he might go to the cops. Maybe that sounds paranoid, but I do not think it's so ridiculous. People have gone to prison for much lesser things than accusations of child-killing.

A quiet, small-town existence. An unexpected Facebook message, jolting her back to the past. A history she's reluctant to revisit- dark memories and unspoken trauma, warning knocks on bedroom walls, unfathomable loss. She became a new person a long time ago. What happens when buried stories are dragged into the light? This epic novel is sublimely wrought in devastating detail, *Bodies of Light* confirms Jennifer Down as one of the writers defining her generation.

About The Author

WINNER OF THE 2022 MILES FRANKLIN LITERARY AWARD

Jennifer Down is a writer and editor who was named Sydney Morning Herald Young Novelist of the Year consecutively in 2017 and 2018. *Our Magic Hour*, her debut novel, was shortlisted for the 2014 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript. Her second book, *Pulse Points*, was the winner of the 2018 Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction and the 2018 Steele Rudd Award for a Short Story Collection in the Queensland Literary Awards and was shortlisted for a 2018 NSW Premier's Literary Award. She lives in Naarm/Melbourne.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

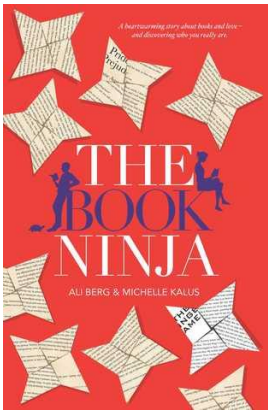
Discussion Questions

1. If the novel hadn't begun with the adult Maggie, do you think you would still be drawn into her the story the same way?
2. Jennifer Down deftly covers themes of grief, loss and mental health in this book. How did you feel during the reading experience? Is this simply a sad story or did you find moments of hope throughout?
3. Maggie and Damien have very different experiences of family growing up. How does this impact their reaction to their losses?
4. 'My leaving was selfish and cruel. I also think that most people would do the selfish thing if it meant surviving.' Put yourself in Maggie's shoes. Would you have left? Do you think leaving was a selfish act?
5. Do you think it's possible to walk away from one life and create another? What would pose the biggest challenge? Beyond self-protection, do you think Maggie had any further motivation for her departure?
6. What do you think present-day Maggie feels about the idea of motherhood?
7. What does Maggie's relationship with Judith tell us about the way we create family?
8. Tony contacts Maggie through Facebook to ask questions about her identity and past. What are the ethical ramifications of someone doing this? How would you feel if you were Maggie?
9. Some would say that Bodies of Light has an open ending. How do you feel about the way the book concludes?
10. If you've read Jennifer Down's previous work, how does this book compare with the others?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Book Ninja

Ali Berg and Michelle Kalus

About this Book

Frankie Rose is desperate for love. Or a relationship. Or just a date with a semi-normal person will do. It's not that she hasn't tried. She's the queen of online dating. But enough is enough. Inspired by her job at The Little Brunswick Street Bookshop, Frankie decides to take fate into her own hands and embarks on the ultimate love experiment.

About the Authors

Ali Berg and Michelle Kalus are the Melbourne-based cofounders of Books on the Rail, an initiative that encourages Aussies to put down the iPhone and pick up a book. Together, Ali and Michelle wrote *The Book Ninja*, published in 2018 by Simon & Schuster Australia, which has been sold to nine different territories around the world.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

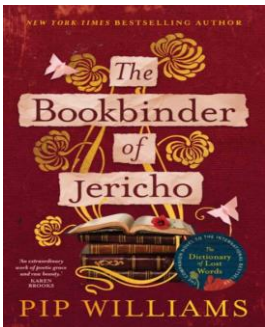
1. Questions for Discussion
2. How did you experience the book? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why? Did you find yourself amused, intrigued, enthralled, disturbed, fearful, irritated, angered, or impatient?
3. Which characters do you admire or dislike and why? What are their primary characteristics; how would you describe them?
4. What motivates the actions of a given character? To what degree does the character's past play a role in her present actions? Are those actions justified or ethical?
5. Do any characters grow or change over the course of the novel
6. Is the story well developed?
7. What central ideas might the author be exploring-the novel's themes? Consider ideas about the nature of love, the requirements of goodness, the meaning of justice, the burden of the past...basic human issues that are at stake in the book.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes

Bookbinder of Jericho, The Pip Williams



About This Book

The Bookbinder of Jericho is about two young women. Peggy and Maude are identical twins who work in the bindery at Oxford University Press. This is the place that printed the very first dictionary mentioned in the previous book. The girls in the bindery are responsible for folding and collating the pages of the books before they are sent to the “men’s side” for the proof reading and covers – jobs that are obviously too difficult for mere women.

Peggy is very intelligent, and Maude is extraordinary but childlike and vulnerable. Peggy has looked after Maude since their mother passed a few years ago. They live on a canal boat which is full of books that are deemed not good enough to be sold and so have been lovingly smuggled out of the bindery, by Peggy and previously her mother, to be given a place on their boat. Eventually, war comes to England when refugees arrive from Belgium after their country is bombed, and then the Spanish Flu comes into an already decimated population. We are unfortunately still dealing with similar issues today.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Williams' research before she writes her books is impeccable. As names and situations come up, it is possible to google their role in history which truthfully mirrors their stories in **The Bookbinder of Jericho**. Because the names of artists, suffragists, and soldiers are often real people, it makes their stories more tragic.

World War I took the men away and women had to step into positions they were not trained for. As readers, we are taken on a journey through the war years as life becomes more difficult. We are privy to Peggy's blossoming romance, her desire to go to university when only those with class and money have gone before. We watch her sister grow and receive love from those who take time to listen, and we cry with them when the injustices of war and disease strike.

About The Author

Pip Williams was born in London, grew up in Sydney, and now lives in the Adelaide Hills of South Australia with her family and an assortment of animals. She has spent most of her working life as a social researcher, studying what keeps us well and what helps us thrive. She is the author of ***One Italian Summer***, a memoir of her family's travels in search of the good life, which was published by Affirm Press to wide acclaim. Her first novel, ***The Dictionary of Lost Words***, based on her original research in the Oxford English Dictionary archives, was published in 2020 and became an international bestseller. ***The Bookbinder of Jericho*** is her second novel and again combines her talent for historical research and beautiful storytelling.

Discussion Questions

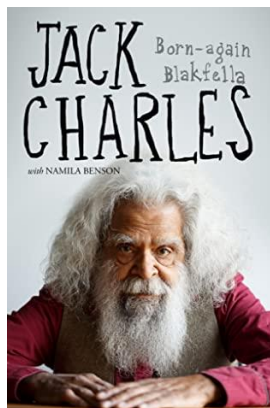
There are book club questions at the back of the book.

1. How did you experience the book?
2. What did you find most surprising, intriguing, or difficult to understand?
3. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
4. Do the issues affect your life? How so - directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?
5. What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue? Has it introduced you to a culture in your own country?
6. Would you recommend this book to a family member or friend?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Born – Again Blakfella

Jack Charles

About This Book

Jack Charles has worn many hats throughout his life: actor, cat burglar, musician, heroin addict, activist, even Senior Victorian Australian of the Year. But the title he is most proud to claim is that of Aboriginal Elder.

Stolen from his mother and placed into institutional care when he was only a few months old, Uncle Jack was raised under the government's White Australia Policy. The loneliness and isolation he experienced during those years had a devastating impact on him that endured long after he reconnected with his Aboriginal roots and discovered his stolen identity. Even today he feels like an outsider; a loner; a fringe dweller.

In this honest and no-holds-barred memoir, Uncle Jack reveals the 'ups and downs of this crazy, drugged up, locked up, and at times unbelievable, life'. From his sideline as a cat burglar, battles with drug addiction and stints in prison, to gracing the nation's stages and screens as he dazzled audiences with his big personality and acting prowess, he takes us through the most formative moments of his life.

About the Author

Jack Charles born 5 September 1943 has worn many hats throughout his life - actor, cat burglar, musician, heroin addict, activist, even Senior Victorian Australian of the Year. But the title he is most proud to claim is that of Aboriginal Elder.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the title? Would you have given the book a different title? If yes, what is your title?
2. What were the themes of the book? Do you feel they were adequately explored? Were they brought to life in a cliché or in a unique manner?
3. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
4. What scene was the most pivotal for the book? How do you think the story would have changed had that scene not taken place?
5. What scene resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way? Why?
6. Has anything ever happened to you like what happened in the book? How did you react to it differently?
7. What surprised you the most about the book?
8. Were there any notable racial, cultural, traditions, gender, sexuality or socioeconomic factors at play in the book? If so, what? How did it effect the characters? Do you think they were realistically portrayed?
9. How important is the setting & time period to the story? How would it have played out differently in a different setting? What about a different time period?
10. Were there any quotes that stood out to you? Why?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Boys Will Be Boys

Clementine Ford

About this Book

Clementine Ford reports that one of the questions she is most asked in person and online is 'how do I raise my son to be a feminist? How do I make sure he's a supporter rather than a perpetrator?' That is a question that many parents with sons are haunted by. Now that Clem is mother to a baby boy of her own, it is a question that haunts her, too. How does a feminist raise a son in a world that conditions boys into entitlement, privilege and power at the expense not just of girls' humanity but also their own? All boys start innocent, but by the time they are adolescents many of them will subscribe to a view of masculinity that is openly contemptuous of women and girls. This explosive new work will look at toxic masculinity and the closed ranks of brotherhood that shape an entitled, disrespectful and potentially dangerous idea of manhood. In *Boys Will Be Boys*, bestselling and ground-breaking author of *Fight Like a Girl* Clementine Ford dismantles the age-old idea that entitlement, aggression and toxicity are natural realms for boys and reveals how the patriarchy we live in is as harmful to boys and men as it is to women and girls.

About the Author

Clementine Ford (born 1981) is an Australian feminist freelance writer, broadcaster and public speaker based in Melbourne. She wrote for a regular column for *Daily Life* for seven years.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

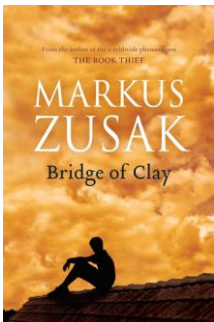
Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? It's not always helpful to talk about whether you liked the book, but rather how you felt as you were reading it? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why? Did you find yourself amused, intrigued, enthralled, disturbed, fearful, irritated, angered, or impatient?
2. What is the significance of the title? Would you have given the book a different title? If yes, what is your title?
3. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
4. Has anything ever happened to you similar to what happened in the book? How did you react to it differently?
5. What surprised you the most about the book?
6. What evidence does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?
7. What kind of language does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?
8. What are the implications for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?
9. What solutions does the author propose? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?
10. How controversial are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?
11. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
12. What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Bridge of Clay

Markus Zusak

About this Book

*Let me tell you about our brother.
The fourth Dunbar boy named Clay.
Everything happened to him.
We were all of us changed through him.*

The Dunbar boys bring each other up in a house run by their own rules. A family of ramshackle tragedy - their mother is dead, their father has fled - they love and fight, and learn to reckon with the adult world.

It is Clay, the quiet one, who will build a bridge, for his family, for his past, for his sins. He builds a bridge to transcend humanness. To survive!

About the Author

Markus Zusak is the bestselling author of six novels, including *The Book Thief* and *The Messenger*. His books have been translated into more than forty languages, to both popular and critical acclaim. He lives in Sydney with his wife and two children.

citylibraries

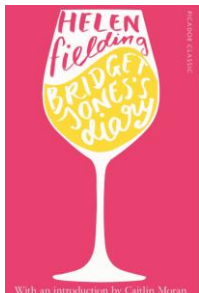
 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. Which character was your favourite and why?
2. Is there any character that you would have liked to know more about?
3. Why do you think Clay kept his secret about Penny's death for so long? What signs are there early on that he has a secret of this magnitude.
4. Penelope's story is both extraordinary and ordinary, in its own way. What does it have to say about the journey's asylum seekers have to make? What does this tell us about Penny in particular?
5. Why do you think the boys finding Achilles on the bridge after the flood is so momentous?
6. Why were the animals integral in keeping the boys together in their parentless house?
7. The wilder natural environment of Michael Dunbar's property, including the 'corridor of strapping eucalypts' provides a stark contrast to the book's urban settings. How are the different settings used to convey different ideas in the story?
8. There is much tragedy in Bridge of Clay, but the novel is also punctuated with surprising moments of humour. How does Zusak use humour in unexpected ways?
9. The racing quarter, including the Dunbar house in Archer Street, features heavily in this book: it could almost be said to be a character in its own right. How does this setting colour and inform the book's main storylines?
10. Events yet to be described for the reader, even if they have already happened, are often suggested to be 'in waters still to come'. Why do you think Markus Zusak might have used this expression?

Book Club Reading Notes



Bridget Jones's Diary

Helen Fielding

About the Book

Bridget Jones's Diary follows the fortunes of a single girl on an optimistic but doomed quest for self-improvement.

Cheered by feminist ranting with her friends Jude, Shazzer and 'hag-fag' Tom, humiliated at Smug Marrieds' dinner parties, crazed by parental attempts to fix her up with a rich divorcee in a diamond-patterned sweater, Bridget lurches from torrid affair to pregnancy-scare convinced that if she could just get down to 8st 7, stop smoking and develop Inner Poise, all would be resolved. Bridget Jones first came to public attention in Helen Fielding's hugely popular fictional diary in the *Independent* newspaper. In this novel based on her creation, Fielding offers us a brilliantly funny picaresque tale: a year in the life of a girl determined to "have it all"—the second she is finished this cigarette and phoned Shazzer.

About the Author

Helen Fielding is a contemporary English author and a screenwriter. She gained massive popularity for her novel, *Bridget Jones's Diary*. She also won British Book of the Year award for her novel. Born on February 19, 1958, Fielding grew up in Morley, West Yorkshire. Her father was a managing director in a factory nearby her home. He died when she was twenty-four years old. She received her early education from Wakefield Girls High School and then she went on to major in English from St. Anne's College, Oxford. Moreover, she performed in the Oxford revue at the 1978 Edinburgh Festival where she met and became friends with notable figures such as, Rowan Atkinson and Richard Curtis. Fielding began her professional career in 1979 working as a regional researcher for BBC's news magazine *Nationwide*. In the following years she was promoted to the position of production manager, she produced a number of light entertainment and children's show. In 1985, she produced a live broadcast for *Comic Relief* in Sudan. She created two documentaries in Africa with the aim of fundraising. Then she researched for the documentary,

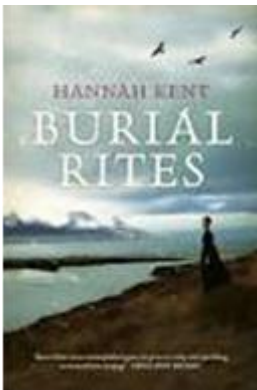
Discussion Questions

1. At one-point Bridget realizes that she's been on a diet for so many years that "the idea that you might actually need calories to survive has been completely wiped out of my consciousness." Yet one of her greatest assets is that she recognizes that this eternal quest for self-improvement is doomed and silly. How does the media influence women's self-images? Why do women collaborate so energetically in the process? When Bridget decides she's simply not up to the struggle and is going to stay home in an egg-spotted sweater, it is a victory or a defeat?
2. Was the book as satisfying to read as a conventionally structured novel? How did the diary form affect your impression of *Bridget Jones's Diary*? Does it make you want to keep one, and if so, why?
3. What do you think Bridget looks like? Why does Fielding never describe her? Given the frequent references to shagging, why are there no steamy sex scenes either?
4. "We women are only vulnerable because we are a pioneer generation daring to refuse to compromise in love and relying on our own economic power. In twenty years', time men won't even dare start with f***wittage because we will just laugh in their faces," bellows Sharon early in the story. What purpose does Sharon's character serve? Do you think she's got a point? How do you think Bridget's daughter's story might differ from her mother's?
5. At one-point Bridget describes her mother as having been infected with "Having It All Syndrome." Does Bridget herself have a closet case of the same affliction? (She does, after all, have an affair with her glamorous boss in publishing and a knack for TV production.) How important is professional achievement to the Bridget's of the world?
6. On the one hand, Bridget's mother gets her daughter the job in television and is a constant in her daughter's life; on the other hand, she's impossibly self-centred, endlessly critical, and an object of some competition. "Bloody Mum," Bridget groans at one point, "how come she gets to be the irresistible sex goddess?" Is Bridget's mother a negative or positive influence on Bridget? How has she shaped her daughter?
7. "We're not lonely. We have extended families in the form of networks of friends," says Tom, joining Sharon in deploring others' "arrogant hand-wringing about single life." Are these "urban families" an acceptable alternative to traditional family units? Are they helping to move society towards Fielding's objective, an unbiased acceptance of different ways of life?
8. Bridget's world is unrelentingly self-centred. Is this problematic? If not, is Bridget rescued by her wit and lack of self-pity, by the fact that she does take responsibility for herself or by something else entirely?
9. Is the attraction between Mark Darcy and Bridget credible? Why isn't he too "safe" for her? Why isn't she too scatterbrained for him? Is it satisfying or clichéd when he literally carries her off to bed?
10. How much of Bridget's identity lies in the quest for a decent relationship? Do you think marriage would change her



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Burial Rites

Hannah Kent

About this Book

Set against Iceland's stark landscape, Agnes, who, charged with the brutal murder of her former master, is sent to an isolated farm to await execution. Horrified at the prospect of housing a convicted murderer, the family at first avoids Agnes. Only Tóti, a priest Agnes has mysteriously chosen to be her spiritual guardian, seeks to understand her. But as Agnes's death looms, the farmer's wife and their daughters learn there is another side to the sensational story they've heard.

About the Author

- Birth—1985
- Where—Adelaide, Australia
- Education—Ph.D., Flinders University (in progress)
- Awards—Writing Australia Unpublished Manuscript Award
- Currently—lives in Adelaide, Australia

Hannah Kent is a contemporary Australian writer, as well as the co-founder and deputy editor of Australian literary journal Kill Your Darlings. She is completing her PhD at Flinders University. In 2011 she won the inaugural Writing Australia Unpublished Manuscript Award

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

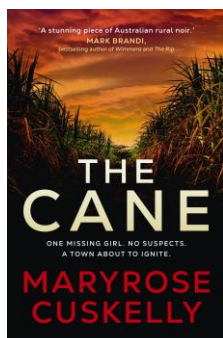
Discussion Questions

1. The death penalty and consequences of a death sentence feature heavily in this book.
2. How does this make us reflect on the current use of the death penalty in society?
3. How was the death penalty used during this time period in Iceland?
4. What were the roles of women and men in the households?
5. What do you believe drew Agnes to Natan, and vice versa?
6. The characters in the story are educated and literate. Is this surprising? How does this affect the narrative?
7. Questions of spirituality and faith are central to Agnes's journey. When did she rely on faith and when did she doubt it?
8. What does Hannah Kent teach the reader about Icelandic culture? How is Icelandic culture revealed through each character, as well as the history and setting?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Cane Maryrose Cuskelly

About This Book

Quala, a north Queensland sugar town, the 1970s. Barbara McClymont walks the cane fields searching for Janet, her sixteen-year-old daughter, who has been missing for weeks. The Police have no leads. The people of Quala are divided by dread and distrust. But the sugar crush is underway and the cane must be burned.

Meanwhile, children dream of a malevolent presence in the cane, a schoolteacher yearns to escape, and history keeps returning to remind Quala that the past is always present. As the smoke rises and tensions come to a head, the dark heart of Quala will be revealed, affecting the lives all those who dwell beyond the cane.

About The Author

Maryrose Cuskelly is a writer of fiction and non-fiction. She has lived in Melbourne for many years, but she was born in Queensland, where, in the early 1970s, there were several high-profile child abductions and murders. The disappearance of Mackay schoolgirl Marilyn Wallman, in particular, made a lasting impression on her. In 2016, Maryrose was awarded the New England Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing (non-fiction) for her essay 'Well Before Dark' about Marilyn's disappearance and the way it percolated through her own childhood and later life. *The Cane* returns to some of the themes and preoccupations of that essay. In 2019, Maryrose's book *Wedderburn: A true tale of blood and dust* (Allen & Unwin, 2018) was longlisted for Best Debut and Best True Crime in the 2019 Davitt Awards. She is also the author of *Original Skin: Exploring the marvels of the human hide* (Scribe, 2010) and *The End of Charity: Time for social enterprise* (with Nic Frances, Allen & Unwin, 2008), which was the winner of the Iremonger Award.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

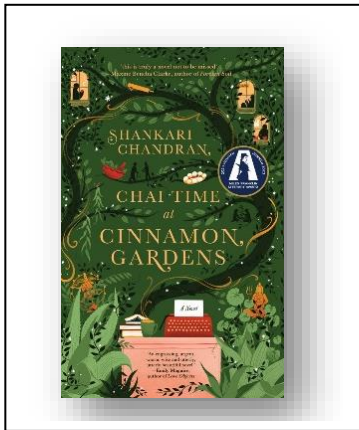
TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. How important was the time period or the setting to the story?
2. How would the book have played out differently in a different time period or setting?
3. Which location in the book would you most like to visit and why?
4. Were there any quotes (or passages) that stood out to you? Why?
5. What did you like most about the book? What did you like the least?
6. How did the book make you feel? What emotions did it evoke?
7. Are there any books that you would compare this book to?
8. Have you read any other books by this author? How would you compare them to this selection?
9. What do you think the author's goal was in writing this book? What ideas were they trying to illustrate? What message were they trying to send?
10. What did you learn from this book?
11. Did your opinion of this book change as you read it? How?
12. Would you recommend the book to a friend? How would you summarize the story if you were to recommend it?
13. Was the book satisfying to read? Why or why not?
14. If you could talk to the author, what burning question would you want to ask?



Book Club Reading Notes



Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens

Shankari Chandran

About This Book

Cinnamon Gardens Nursing Home is nestled in the quiet suburb of Westgrove, Sydney – populated with residents with colourful histories, each with their own secrets, triumphs and failings. This is their safe place, an oasis of familiar delights – a beautiful garden, a busy kitchen and a bountiful recreation schedule. The serenity of Cinnamon Gardens is threatened by malignant forces more interested in what makes this refuge different rather than embracing the calm companionship that makes this place home to so many. As those who challenge the residents' existence make their stand against the nursing home with devastating consequences, our characters are forced to reckon with a country divided.

About The Author

Shankari Chandran, an author of literary fiction, delves into themes of injustice, dispossession, and community in her novels. "Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens" and her debut, "Song of the Sun God," explore these themes and were published by Ultimo Press. Before becoming a writer, she worked in social justice, with experience spanning 30 countries and touching on issues such as detainees in Guantanamo Bay. Her writing draws from her understanding of international humanitarian law and the consequences of governments infringing on civil liberties. Chandran began her writing career after returning to Australia and the birth of her fourth child in 2010, ultimately achieving recognition for her thought-provoking work.

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

 [Citylibraries Townsville](https://www.facebook.com/CitylibrariesTownsville)

 [townsvillelib](https://www.instagram.com/townsvillelib)

Discussion Questions

1. The book explores the theme of community-building in the context of the Cinnamon Gardens Nursing Home. How does the nursing home become a microcosm of the broader Australian society? Discuss the role of the nursing home in the story.
2. Maya Ali, one of the central characters, is depicted as both formidable and motherly. How does Maya's background and experiences shape her perspective on Australian society? What does she symbolize in the narrative?
3. The removal of Captain Cook's statue from the nursing home's grounds is a significant subplot in the book. How does this event shed light on the complexity of issues related to history and symbolism in countries with a colonial past? Discuss the reactions of the characters and their implications.
4. The novel touches on issues of racism and prejudice faced by members of diasporic communities in Australia. How do these themes manifest in the story, and how do the characters respond to them?
5. Shankari Chandran weaves multiple character perspectives and backstories into the narrative. Which character's story resonated with you the most, and why?
6. Maya's experience in the publishing industry and her creation of a pseudonym, Sarah Byrne, raises questions about cultural representation in literature. How does the novel comment on the whiteness of Australian publishing, and what message does it convey about the importance of diverse voices in literature?
7. The book covers a wide range of topics, including politics, race, history, and relationships. How does the author manage to integrate these themes seamlessly into the narrative without feeling didactic or forced? Discuss examples from the story.
8. Maya's decision to study stereotypical Australianness in fiction is a significant subplot. How does this choice reflect her perspective on Australian society, and what does it reveal about her character?
9. The Cinnamon Gardens Nursing Home is depicted as a place of refuge and community. Discuss the various relationships and bonds formed within the nursing home and how they contribute to the novel's overarching themes.
10. The book addresses important societal issues and invites readers to engage in a conversation about these topics. How did "Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens" impact your understanding of the themes it explores, and what discussions or questions did it raise for you?

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

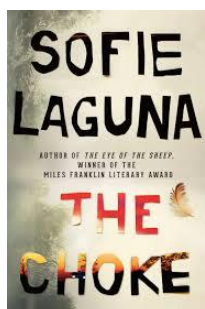
 Citylibraries Townsville

 [townsvillelib](https://www.youtube.com/townsvillelib)



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Choke
Sofie Laguna

About This Book

Abandoned by her mother and only occasionally visited by her secretive father, Justine is raised by her Pop, a man tormented by visions of the Burma Railway. Justine finds sanctuary in Pop's chooks and The Choke, where the banks of the Murray River are so narrow it seems they might touch - a place of staggering natural beauty. But the river can't protect Justine from danger. Her father is a criminal, and the world he exposes her to can be lethal.

Justine is overlooked and underestimated, a shy and often silent observer of her chaotic world. She has to find ways to survive so much neglect. She must hang on to friendship when it comes, she must hide when she has to, and ultimately, she must fight back.

About The Author

Sofie Laguna originally studied to be a lawyer, but decided law wasn't for her. Sofie then worked for many years as an actor before she began to write – both for children and adults.

Her first novel for adults, *'One Foot Wrong'*, was published throughout Europe, the US and the UK, whilst her second adult novel, *'The Eye of the Sheep'* – won the 2015 Miles Franklin Award and has been optioned for both film and theatre.

Sofie's many books for young people have been published in the US, the UK and in translation throughout Europe and Asia.

Sofie lives in Melbourne with her husband, illustrator Marc McBride, and their two sons.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

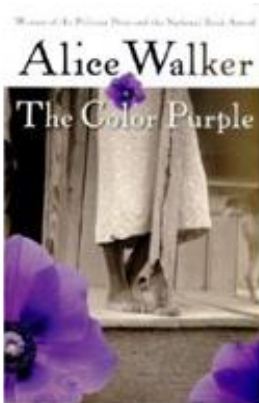
Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the choke to Justine both as a landscape and a concept?
2. Justine refers to her father as both Ray and Dad. How does this affect their relationship?
3. Aunt Rita tells her niece '*Friends can really make the difference.*' (p. 110)
Is this true for Justine?
4. What role does Pop play in both keeping the family together, and tearing them apart?
5. Pop's chickens provided a sense of comfort, calm and certainty to Justine. Why do you believe she ends their lives so violently?
6. '*I never had words to ask anybody the questions, so I never had the answers.*'
Do you think Justine finds her voice by the end of the novel?
7. '*Why did everybody else choose what was possible for me?*' (p.331)
To what extent has Justine ever had any control over her life?
8. *The Choke* presents us with a disadvantaged child enduring often terrible circumstances, but ends on a note of optimism. How important do you think this optimism is to the success of the story?
9. Many figures in Justine's life abandon her in one way or another—except for Pop. Do you think he is trying his best to care for her? Does Justine abandon him?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Color Purple

Alice Walker

About this Book

The Color Purple is the story of two sisters--one a missionary to Africa and the other a child wife living in the South--who remain loyal to one another across time, distance, and silence. Beautifully imagined and deeply compassionate, this classic of American literature is rich with passion, pain, inspiration, and an indomitable love of life.

About the Author

Alice Walker (b. 1944), one of the United States' preeminent writers, is an award-winning author of novels, stories, essays, and poetry. In 1983, Walker became the first African American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for fiction with her novel *The Color Purple*, which also won the National Book Award. Her other books include *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *Meridian*, *The Temple of My Familiar*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. In her public life, Walker has worked to address problems of injustice, inequality, and poverty as an activist, teacher, and public intellectual.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

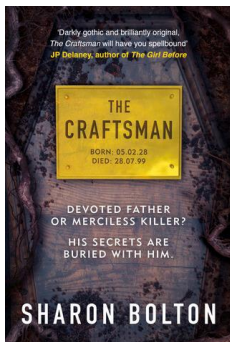
Discussion Questions

1. In Celie's first letter to God, she asks for a sign to let her know what is happening to her. Discuss the way confusion and deception become powerful tools for those characters who want to take advantage of Celie.
2. What is the effect of not knowing Albert's last name? In early novels, it was not uncommon for authors to use a blank in place of a character's name, to create the illusion that the character was someone the reader might know—someone whose identity had to be kept secret. What does it mean that Celie must call her husband Mr. ____? When does she at last begin calling him by his first name?
3. Why does Albert tell Harpo to begin beating his wife, Sofia? Why is it so important to Harpo that his wife have no will of her own? Is his relationship with Squeak (Mary Agnes) fulfilling? What do these scenes tell us about the nature of abusive cycles? Is cruelty something that is taught—something that is unnatural? In your opinion, what does it take for someone (male or female) to deserve true respect?
4. Just as Celie grew up being told she was inferior; Shug Avery was always told she was evil. What are your impressions of Shug, from the photo Celie sees early on, to the end of the novel, when Celie and Albert have united in their devotion to Shug? What does Shug teach Celie about being loved, and about finding one's true self? What price does Sofia pay for being her true self?
5. What does it take for Celie to finally reach her boiling point and reject oppression?
6. What is Celie's opinion of Grady and his haze of addiction?
7. Why is it difficult for Shug to commit to the people who love her? In what ways does Shug bring both pleasure and heartache to them?
8. Nettie's life with Corrine and Samuel gives her the first semblance of a healthy family life she has ever known, but Corrine's jealousy taints this. Only the memory of that crucial early scene, when Celie lays eyes on her daughter at the store, absolves Nettie just before Corrine dies. The Color Purple brims with these intricate turns of plot. List the seemingly minor scenes that turn out to be pivotal in the lives of the characters.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Craftsman

SJ Bolton

About this Book

August, 1999

On the hottest day of the year, Assistant Commissioner Florence Lovelady attends the funeral of Larry Glassbrook, the convicted murderer she arrested thirty years earlier. A master carpenter and funeral director, Larry imprisoned his victims, alive, in the caskets he made himself. Clay effigies found entombed with their bodies suggested a motive beyond the worst human depravity.

About the Author

Sharon J Bolton was born and brought up in Lancashire, the eldest of three daughters. As a child, she dreamed of becoming an actress and a dancer, studying ballet, tap and jazz from a young age and reading drama at Loughborough University.

She spent her early career in marketing and PR before returning to full-time education to study for a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) at Warwick University, where she met her husband, Andrew. They moved to London and Sharon held a number of PR posts in the City. She left the City to work freelance, to start a family and to write.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions



1. How did you experience the book? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why? Did you find yourself amused, intrigued, enthralled, disturbed, fearful, irritated, angered, or impatient?
2. Which characters do you admire or dislike and why? What are their primary characteristics; how would you describe them?
3. What motivates the actions of a given character? To what degree does the character's past play a role in her present actions? Are those actions justified or ethical?
4. Do any characters grow or change over the course of the novel?
5. Is the story well developed?
6. What central ideas might the author be exploring-the novel's themes? Consider ideas about the nature of love, the requirements of goodness, the meaning of justice, the burden of the past...basic human issues that are at stake in the book.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Crimson Thread

Kate Forsyth

About This Book

In Crete during World War II, May 1941. German paratroopers launch a blitzkrieg from the air against Crete. They are met with fierce defiance by the Greeks. During the bloody eleven-day battle, Alenka a young Greek woman saves the lives of two Australian soldiers who are childhood friends who joined up together to see the world. Both men fall in love with Alenka. They are forced to retreat with the tattered remains of the Allied forces over the towering White Mountains. Both are among the seven thousand Allied soldiers left behind in the desperate evacuation from Crete's storm-lashed southern coast. Alenka hides Jack and Teddy at great risk to herself. Her brother Axel is a Nazi sympathiser and collaborator and spies on her movements. As Crete suffers under the Nazi jackboot, Alenka is drawn into an intense triangle of conflicting emotions with Jack and Teddy. Their friendship suffers under the strain of months of hiding and their rivalry for her love.

About The Author

Kate Forsyth wrote her first novel at the age of seven and is now the internationally bestselling author of 40 books for both adults and children.

Kate has a doctorate in fairytale studies, a Masters of Creative Writing, a Bachelor of Arts in Literature, and is an accredited master storyteller.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

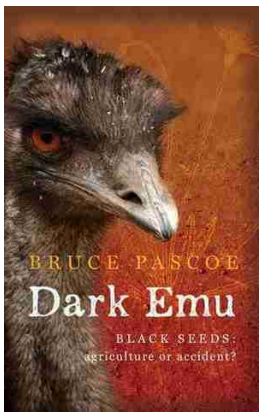
Discussion Questions

1. The Greek resistance to German occupation during the Second World War was long and fierce, and the reprisals for those mounting resistance were among the most cruel. Did you know much about the battles fought in Greece, and particularly Crete?
2. Love triangles exist in life and fiction. In times of war and trauma, emotions run high. How much do you believe the behavior of all three of our heroes; Jack, Teddy and Alenka, was affected by the ongoing battles around them?
3. It is not only the German occupying forces who were capable of doing terrible things in *The Crimson Thread*. Other characters show they too are capable of being monstrous. Did you find this aspect of the novel to be surprising?
4. Are Axel and Teddy a product of the behavior of their fathers, or are other factors at play?
5. The title of the novel, *The Crimson Thread*, comes from the Minotaur in the Labyrinth myth. Were you familiar with this story, and were you aware it was based in Crete?
6. Who is the true minotaur at the heart of the book?
7. The myth is usually retold with the Greek hero Theseus at the centre of the tale. Kate Forsyth draws upon older, matriarchal versions in which the Cretan princess Ariadne is the protagonist. *The Crimson Thread* sits within a genre of ensuring the female voices in these ancient stories are heard. How do you feel about myths being reframed?
8. Alenka embroiders secret messages in code and so manages to smuggle out crucial information to the Allies. Jack, too, learns to write messages in needle and thread. Kate Forsyth learnt how to embroider so that she could properly describe this ancient art, and now loves it so much she embroiders every day. Why do you think embroidery and other traditional women's arts such as weaving and quilt-making are considered crafts, while men's creative occupations are more likely to be considered art?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Dark Emu

Bruce Pascoe

About This Book

Dark Emu puts forward an argument for a reconsideration of the hunter-gatherer tag for precolonial Aboriginal Australians. The evidence insists that Aboriginal people right across the continent were using domesticated plants, sowing, harvesting, irrigating and storing – behaviours inconsistent with the hunter-gatherer tag. Gerritsen and Gammage in their latest books support this premise but Pascoe takes this further and challenges the hunter-gatherer tag as a convenient lie. Almost all the evidence comes from the records and diaries of the Australian explorers, impeccable sources.

About the Author

Bruce Pascoe was born of Bunurong and Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond and graduated from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Education. He is a member of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative of southern Victoria and has been the director of the Australian Studies Project for the Commonwealth Schools Commission.

Bruce has had a varied career as a teacher, farmer, fisherman, barman, fencing contractor, lecturer, Aboriginal language researcher, archaeological site worker and editor.

He won the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Literature Award in 1999 and his novel Fog a Dox (published by Magabala Books in 2012), won the Young Adult category of the 2013 Prime Minister's Literary Awards.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

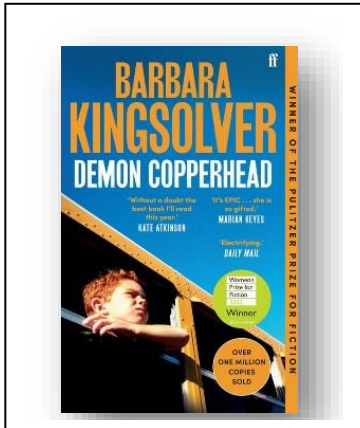
TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. In the past, Aboriginal people didn't build the types of houses we live in today. Why?
2. How do traditional Aboriginal seasons compare with the European seasons that have been adopted in Australia?
3. The author, Bruce Pascoe, believes that the early settlers, authorities and explorers did not present the evidence of the farming techniques and established Aboriginal communities because it would have proved previous ownership and usage by Aboriginal people. He believes that this would not have been beneficial for the European settlers in their choice for establishing colonies on prime land areas throughout Australia. Discuss his point of view. Why might this not have been widely reported previously?
4. Discuss the way in which Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander knowledge about native Australian animals assist them?
5. What can be learnt from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people about native animals and plants that could be used to protect Australian flora and fauna, particularly endangered species?
6. How would the experiences of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compare with the lives of newly arrived English settlers? Discuss the perspectives of those whose land was taken away or overrun with cattle and sheep. Discuss the implications of 'white' farming on the history and culture of Indigenous people.
7. Kangaroo meat is relatively new to mainstream meat markets but has long been part of Aboriginal traditions. Discuss the way in which Aboriginal people farmed and harvested kangaroos.
8. Discuss traditional hunting techniques of Indigenous people living in or around your area.



Book Club Reading Notes



Demon Copperhead Barbara Kingsolver

About This Book

Demon's story begins with his traumatic birth to a single mother in a single-wide trailer, looking 'like a little blue prize-fighter.' For the life ahead of him he would need all of that fighting spirit, along with buckets of charm, a quick wit, and some unexpected talents, legal and otherwise. In the southern Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, poverty and addiction aren't ideas. They're as natural as the grass grows. For Demon, born on the wrong side of luck, the affection and safety he craves is as remote as the ocean he dreams of seeing one day. The wonder is in how far he's willing to travel to try and get there. Suffused with truth, anger and compassion, Demon Copperhead is an epic tale of love, loss and everything in between.

About The Author

Barbara Kingsolver, an American novelist, essayist, and poet, is known for her socially conscious works. Raised in rural Kentucky, she pursued degrees in Biology, worked as a freelance writer, and began writing novels. Notable books include "The Poisonwood Bible," depicting a missionary family in the Congo, and "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle," a non-fiction account of eating locally. Her writing explores themes of social justice, biodiversity, and human-environment interactions. She's received awards like the Orange Prize for Fiction and the National Humanities Medal. Kingsolver established the Bellwether Prize for social change literature. Her life journey took her from Africa to activism and eventually to a farm in Virginia.

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

 [Citylibraries Townsville](#)

 [townvillelib](#)

Discussion Questions

1. "Demon Copperhead" is a retelling of Charles Dickens' "David Copperfield," set in the Appalachian region of America. How does this change in setting affect the story and its themes?
2. The novel addresses issues of social justice and the impact of institutional poverty on children. How do these themes resonate with contemporary society, even though the story is a modern adaptation of a 19th-century classic?
3. Compare the character of Demon Fields (Copperhead) to David Copperfield from the original novel. What similarities and differences do you see between the two characters as they navigate their respective challenges and coming-of-age experiences?
4. In what ways does the author, Barbara Kingsolver, update the source material to make it relevant to the modern reader? Are there aspects where the adaptation is less successful?
5. "Demon Copperhead" explores the seductive nature of quick fixes, such as pills, in the characters' lives. How does the novel portray the allure of these shortcuts and their consequences?
6. The character of Angus Winfield is introduced as a contrast to Dickens' character Agnes Wickfield. How does Angus embody a different kind of sobriety and strength in the story?
7. Discuss the role of family in the novel, including Demon's relationships with the Peggot clan, foster families, and Coach Winfield's family. How do these connections shape Demon's journey?
8. Both the original and the adaptation involve the protagonist's struggle to find purpose and meaning in life. How does Demon's battle with addiction and his quest for sobriety compare to David Copperfield's journey of self-discovery?
9. The novel questions what it means to be a hero, especially in the context of challenging circumstances. How does Demon's story redefine heroism, particularly for those born into difficult lives?
10. How does Barbara Kingsolver's southern, slangy narrative style add to the humor and pathos of "Demon Copperhead"? In what ways does it enhance your connection to the story and its characters?

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

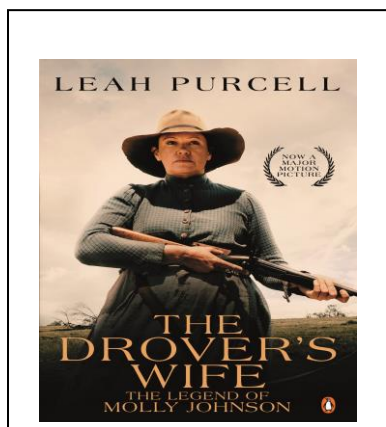
 [Citylibraries Townsville](#)

 [townsvillelib](#)



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Drover's Wife

Leah Purcell

About This Book

The Drover's Wife is utterly authentic, brilliantly plotted, thoroughly harrowing and entirely of our times exploring race, gender, violence, and inheritance.

Deep in the heart of Australia's high country, along an ancient, hidden track, live Molly Johnson, and her children. Husband Joe is away droving, leaving his family in the bush to fend for itself. Molly's children are her world, and life is hard with only their dog, Alligator, and a shotgun for protection – but it can be harder when Joe's around.

In this brave reimagining of the Henry Lawson short story that has become an Australian classic, Purcell brings us a compelling thriller of our pioneering past that confronts head-on issues of today: race, gender, violence, and inheritance.

About The Author

Leah Purcell is a multi-award-winning and self-made author, playwright, actor, director, filmmaker, producer, screenwriter, and showrunner. At the heart of her work are female and First Nation themes, characters, and issues. The Drover's Wife was first a play written by and starring Purcell, which premiered at Belvoir St Theatre in late 2016 and swept the board during the 2017 awards season, winning the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award for Playwriting and Book of the Year; the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Drama and the Victorian Prize for Literature; the Australian

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Writers' Guild Award for Best Stage Work, Major Work, and the David Williamson Prize for Excellence in Writing for Australian Theatre; the Helpmann Award for Best Play and Best New Australian Work; and the Sydney–UNESCO City of Film Award. The feature film adaptation of *The Drover's Wife*, written, directed, and starring Leah Purcell, is slated for a 2020 release. Leah Purcell is a proud Goa, Gunggari, Wakka Wakka Murri woman from Queensland.

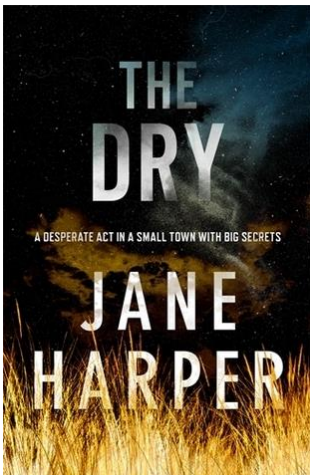
Discussion Questions

1. Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife* was first published in 1892. What is it about this story that compels writers to continue to reimagine it in such a variety of styles and forms?
2. Are you comfortable with the rewriting of well-known Australian stories? Do they add or detract from our national identity?
3. Leah Purcell determinedly gave the eponymous drover's wife a name, Molly Johnson, and moved it into the title of her story. Do you think this was an important act? How did it influence the story?
4. Other aspects of Lawson's life are drawn into Leah Purcell's novel in the naming of Louisa Clintoff and her publication, *Dawn*. What do you think is the motivation behind this?
5. Issues of race, gender, violence, and inheritance are all present in this historical novel. Are they speaking to our past or our present? Why do you think we choose to read historical fiction?
6. *The Drover's Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson* is told from several points of view, and different time periods. Did this style of storytelling work for you? Was there a perspective you preferred to others?
7. Leah Purcell was in the high country, filming the Ray Lawrence film *Lantana*, when she first felt the urge to tell a story set there. She has created this novel and the film version of *The Drover's Wife*: How vital a part of the story is the landscape?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Dry

Jane Harper

About This Book

After getting a note demanding his presence, Federal Agent Aaron Falk arrives in his hometown for the first time in decades to attend the funeral of his best friend, Luke. Twenty years ago when Falk was accused of murder, Luke was his alibi. Falk and his father fled under a cloud of suspicion, saved from prosecution only because of Luke's steadfast claim that the boys had been together at the time of the crime. But now more than one person knows they didn't tell the truth back then, and Luke is dead.

Amid the worst drought in a century, Falk and the local detective question what really happened to Luke. As Falk reluctantly investigates to see if there's more to Luke's death than there seems to be, long-buried mysteries resurface, as do the lies that have haunted them. And Falk will find that small towns have always hidden big secrets.

About The Author

Jane Harper is the author of Australian atmospheric thrillers, *The Dry* and *Force of Nature*. Winner of numerous awards including the 2015 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an Unpublished Manuscript, the 2017 Indie Award Book of the Year and the 2017 Australian Book Industry Awards (ABIA) Australian Book of the Year Award, *The Dry* is Jane's first novel, with rights sold in 29 territories worldwide and film rights optioned to Reese Witherspoon and Bruna Papandrea.

Jane worked as a print journalist for thirteen years both in Australia and the UK and lives in Melbourne. Her second novel, *Force of Nature*, was published in September 2017 in Australia and will be released in the US and UK in February 2018.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

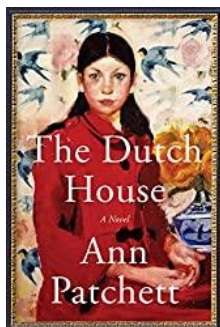
Discussion Questions

1. The novel has a strong sense of place, despite being set in a fictional town. What elements does Harper include to accomplish this? How do the bush, the rock tree, the river, etc. affect the story?
2. Harper has said she is interested in communities where people have known each other—for better or for worse—their entire lives. How does this affect personal relationships? What are the positives and negatives of a small community?
3. Falk describes his group of friends as “teenage tight, where you believe your friends are soulmate and the bonds will last forever.” (p. 13) And yet he later wonders why he and Luke were still friends (p. 185). Did the early bonds last? Were the bonds broken because of their personalities, because they grew apart, or because of the lies they told?
4. How does the drought affect the town? The Hadlers? The reader?
5. How did his father’s doubts affect Falk? How do loved one’s doubts affect the people they are close to? Do we see this in other relationships in *The Dry*?
6. Luke was larger than life. What made people think he was capable of murder?
7. *The Dry* is a book rife with secrets. What secrets do Luke, Jamie, Ellie, and Gretchen tell? How do those secrets affect their relationships? What do they tell us about the nature of truth?
8. Are some secrets better off kept? What might have changed in *The Dry* if certain secrets had remained secret?
9. Do you see archetypal heroes and villains in the characters of *The Dry*? Are there “good” characters and “bad” characters? What were these characters’ motivations?
10. Jane Harper has worked as a journalist for 13 years. How did her personal background affect her telling of the story? Does her writing style make the details more or less believable?
11. When we talked to J.T. Ellison last November, we asked her to give us tips on how to better read and enjoy suspense *as a reader*. Her answer: “Stop looking for the twist.” Did you take her advice? When did you “know”?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Dutch House

Anne Patchett

About This Book

Set over the course of five decades, *The Dutch House* is a dark fairy tale about two smart people who cannot overcome their past. Despite every outward sign of success, Danny and Maeve are only truly comfortable when they are together.

Throughout their lives they return to the well-worn story of what they have lost with humour and rage. But when at last they are forced to confront the people who left them behind, the relationship between an indulged brother and his ever-protective sister is finally tested.

The Dutch House is the story of a paradise lost, a tour de force that digs deeply into questions of inheritance, love and forgiveness, of how we want to see ourselves and of who we really are.

Filled with suspense, you may read it quickly to find out what happens, but what happens to Danny and Maeve will stay with you for a very long time

About the Author

Ann Patchett is an American author of both fiction and nonfiction. She is perhaps best known for her 2001 novel, *Bel Canto*, which won her the Orange Prize and PEN/Faulkner Award and brought her nationwide fame.

Patchett was born in Los Angeles, California, and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. Her mother is the novelist Jeanne Ray. Her father, Frank Patchett, who died in 2012 and had been long divorced from her mother, served as a Los Angeles police officer for 33 years, and participated in the arrests of both Charles Manson and Sirhan Sirhan. The story of Patchett's own family is the basis for her 2016 novel, *Commonwealth*, about the individual lives of a blended family spanning five decades.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

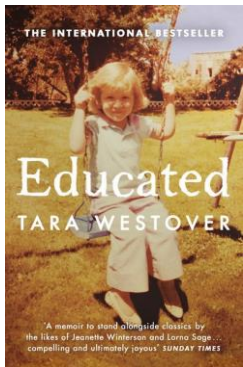
Discussion Questions

1. Did you think Cyril was a good father to Danny and Maeve? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Danny and Maeve kept returning to the Dutch House?
3. After Andrea throws Danny out, Maeve takes him in, and she makes tremendous sacrifices to ensure his success in life. However, she also pushes him to do things that do not align with his goals. Did you agree with all of Maeve's decisions regarding Danny's future? Why do you think she made them?
4. What did you think of Maeve's plot to get revenge on Andrea by using up most of the education trust on Danny? Did you agree with her plan? Did you think it was unfair to Cyril, or to Norma and Bright?
5. In Chapter 9, Danny makes a comment about Celeste's posture — just like his father used to do to Maeve when she was a child. In what ways do you think Danny became more like his father as he grew older? Do you think these changes were intentional?
6. Did you ever sympathize with Andrea?
7. Throughout the novel, Celeste and Maeve are unable to resolve their issues with one another. Have you ever been in a situation where you have struggled to get along with a family member or in-law? How did you handle it?
8. When Elna returns after Maeve's heart attack, Danny and Maeve argue about whether they should forgive their mother for leaving. Whose argument did you agree with, and why?
9. Eventually, Danny decides to get past his issues with his mother and forgive her for Maeve's sake. Do you think you would have been able to forgive Elna? Did you think it was fair of Maeve to ask Danny to do this?
10. What did you think of the end of the novel? Did you like May's decision to buy the Dutch House, or do you wish the family had been able to fully let the house go?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Educated Tara Westover

About This Book

This unforgettable memoir by Tara Westover, shares the story of her growing up as the youngest of 7 children, in rural Idaho in a home surrounded by unacknowledged mental illness and abuse.

Tara's parents were Mormon survivalists and prepared their family for the end of the world by stockpiling home-canned peaches and sleeping with their "head for the hills" bags. Her father's distrust of the medical establishment resulted in gashes, concussions and even severe burns being treated with only herbs concocted by her mother.

When one of Tara's brothers gets himself into college and shares news of the world beyond the mountain with her, she decides to create a new life for herself.

It's only after attending University that Tara wonders if she still has a home to go back to.

About the Author

Tara Westover is an American author. Born in Idaho to a father opposed to public education, she never attended school. She was seventeen the first time she set foot in a classroom. After that first encounter with education, she pursued learning for a decade, graduating *magna cum laude* from Brigham Young University in 2008. She earned a MPhil from Trinity College, Cambridge in 2009, and in 2010 was a visiting fellow at Harvard University. She returned to Cambridge, where she was awarded a PhD in history in 2014. *Educated* is her first novel.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

Discussion Questions

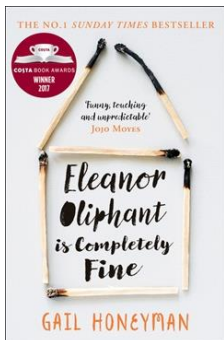


1. Many of Tara's father's choices had an obvious impact on Tara's life, but how did her mother's choices influence her? How did that change over time?
2. Tara's brother Tyler tells her to take the ACT. What motivates Tara to follow his advice?
3. Charles was Tara's first window into the outside world. Under his influence, Tara begins to dress differently and takes medicine for the first time. Discuss Tara's conflicting admiration for both Charles and her father.
4. Tara has titled her book *Educated* and much of her education takes place in classrooms, lectures, or other university environments. What other important moments of "education" were there? What friends, acquaintances, or experiences had the most impact on Tara? What does that imply about what an education is?
5. Tara eventually confronts her family about her brother's abuse. How do different members of her family respond?
6. What keeps Tara coming back to her family as an adult?
7. Ultimately, what type of freedom did education give Tara?
8. Tara wrote this at the age of thirty, while in the midst of her healing process. Why do you think she chose to write it so young, and how does this distinguish the book from similar memoirs?
9. Tara paid a high price for her education. Do you think she would make the same choice again?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine Gail Honeyman

About This Book

Eleanor Oliphant has learned how to survive, but not how to live. She leads a simple life by wearing the same clothes to work every day, eating the same meal-deal for lunch every day and buying the same two bottles of vodka to drink every weekend.

Eleanor Oliphant is happy. Nothing is missing from her carefully timetabled life. but one simple act of kindness is about to shatter her comfortable, familiar life. Now she must learn how to navigate the world that everyone else seems to take for granted whilst searching for the courage to face the dark crevices that she's avoided all her life.

This astonishing story powerfully depicts how lonely life can be at times, and how a simple act of kindness can make a huge difference.

About the Author

Gail Honeyman was born and raised in central Scotland. She studied French language and literature at Glasgow University and continued her education at Oxford University. Upon leaving university, Gail commenced work as a Civil Servant and then as an administrator at Glasgow University. It's whilst working as an administrator that she enrolled in a Faber Academy writing course. Gail then proceeded to enter what would become the first three chapters of her debut novel Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine into a competition for unpublished Female writers. The book has gone onto win numerous awards and wide spread acclaim.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

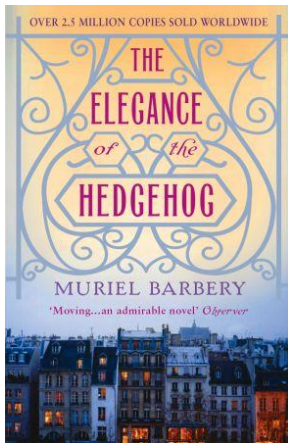
Discussion Questions

1. Knowing the truth about Eleanor's family, look back through the book to revisit her exchanges with her mother. Did you see what was ahead? How did Honeyman lay the groundwork for the final plot twist?
2. What are the different ways that the novel's title could be interpreted? What do you think happens to Eleanor after the book ends?
3. Eleanor says, "These days, loneliness is the new cancer—a shameful, embarrassing thing, brought upon yourself in some obscure way. A fearful, incurable thing, so horrifying that you dare not mention it; other people don't want to hear the word spoken aloud for fear that they might too be afflicted" (p. 227). Do you agree?
4. What does Raymond find appealing about Eleanor? And why does Eleanor feel comfortable opening up to Raymond?
5. Eleanor is one of the most unusual protagonists in recent fiction, and some of her opinions and actions are very funny. What were your favorite moments in the novel?
6. "Did men ever look in the mirror, I wondered, and find themselves wanting in deeply fundamental ways? When they opened a newspaper or watched a film, were they presented with nothing but exceptionally handsome young men, and did this make them feel intimidated, inferior, because they were not as young, not as handsome?" (p. 74). Eleanor's question is rhetorical and slightly tongue-in-cheek, but worth answering. What are your thoughts? If men don't have this experience, why not? If they do, why is it not more openly discussed?
7. Eleanor is frightened that she may become like her mother. Is this a reasonable fear? What is the balance of nature and nurture?
8. Is it possible to emerge from a traumatic childhood unscathed?
9. Eleanor says, "If someone asks you how you are, you are meant to say FINE. You are not meant to say that you cried yourself to sleep last night because you hadn't spoken to another person for two consecutive days. FINE is what you say" (p. 226–227). Why is this the case?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Elegance of the Hedgehog

Muriel Barbery

About This Book

We are in the centre of Paris, in an elegant apartment building inhabited by bourgeois families. Renée, the concierge, is witness to the lavish but vacuous lives of her numerous employers. Outwardly she conforms to every stereotype of the concierge: fat, cantankerous, addicted to television. Yet, unbeknownst to her employers, Renée is a cultured autodidact who adores art, philosophy, music, and Japanese culture. With humour and intelligence she scrutinizes the lives of the building's tenants, who for their part are barely aware of her existence.

About The Author

Muriel Barbery was born in Casablanca, Morocco in 1969. She returned to France and studied Philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Fontenay-Saint-Cloud and taught there after completing her degree. A reclusive person, Barbery only decided to submit her first book, *Une gourmandise*, to publishers with the encouragement of her husband. It was translated into twelve languages and sold over 200 000 copies. *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* is her second novel and propelled her to international acclaim. It has sold over a million copies and received the Rotary International Award and the Prix Georges Brassens.

Muriel Barbery describes Leo Tolstoy as her favourite author and currently lives in Japan with her husband. Her third novel, *The Lives of Elves*, was released in 2016 and was inspired heavily by her experiences in Japan, particularly her interaction with the natural landscape.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

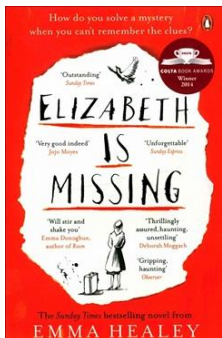
Discussion Questions

1. The book has two narrators: bizarrely brilliant 12-year-old Paloma and short, ugly, plump concierge Renee. Did the two storytellers detract or add to your enjoyment of the story and in whose head did you prefer to dwell?
2. A great deal of the book asks a single question that Paloma eventually poses to Renee. “Do you feel that life has meaning?” Do you?
3. How do you measure a life’s worth? By Paloma’s calculation, what you are doing at the moment of your death is important. Renee died at a moment when she had “met another and was prepared to love.” If you could pick the moment of your death, what would you be doing?
4. Renee thinks most people take the easy way out when it comes to living their lives. We anesthetize ourselves with children, TV and God who “appeases our animal fears and the unbearable prospect that someday all our pleasures will cease.” Have you taken the easy way out?
5. Paloma’s Journal of the Movement of the World is a quest to document whatever is beautiful enough to give life meaning. If you were asked to develop a list of your own, what might make your list?
6. True life is elsewhere...
One French critic called *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* “the ultimate celebration of every person’s invisible part.” How common is the feeling that a part of oneself is invisible to or ignored by others? How much does this “message” contribute to the book’s popularity? Why is it sometimes difficult to show people what we really are and to have them appreciate us for it?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Elizabeth is Missing

Emma Healey

About This Book

Maud is forgetful. She makes a cup of tea and doesn't remember to drink it. She goes to the shops and forgets why she went. Sometimes her home is unrecognizable - or her daughter Helen seems a total stranger.

But there's one thing Maud is sure of: her friend Elizabeth is missing. The note in her pocket tells her so. And no matter who tells her to stop going on about it, to leave it alone, to shut up, Maud will get to the bottom of it.

Because somewhere in Maud's damaged mind lays the answer to an unsolved seventy-year-old mystery. One everyone has forgotten about. Everyone, except Maud . . .

About the Author

Emma Healey grew up in London where she went to Art college and completed her first degree in bookbinding. She then worked for two libraries, two bookshops, two art galleries and two universities, and was busily pursuing a career in the art world before writing overtook everything else. She moved to Norwich in 2010 to study for the MA in Creative Writing at UEA and never moved back again. Elizabeth is Missing, is Emma's first novel.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

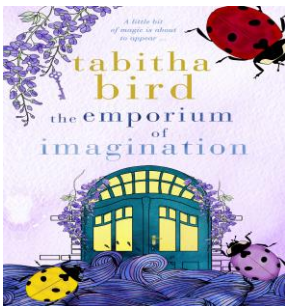
Discussion Questions

1. What interesting and complex narrative effects result from the narrator having such difficulty with her memory?
2. Some of the characters in the book play along with Maude; others won't. What do you think of this strategy and its impact on Maude?
3. How does the consistent shift from present to past affect the telling of the story? How does the author transition between them?
4. In Chapter 1 there are several allusions to Little Red Riding Hood. In what ways might this fairy tale be relevant to the story?
5. Carla, one of Maud's caregivers, often tells of horrible crimes she's read about in the news. How does this add to the novel? How does it affect Maud?
6. What is the difference between something, or someone being missing, lost, or gone? Consider various points of view.
7. In what relevant ways does the war--and all the lengthy separations it causes — affect the people and relationships in the novel?
8. What is the importance and effect of "the mad woman" throughout the novel?
9. Healey describes the symptoms of Maude's decline. What symptoms do you note?
10. What do you think of the relationship between Maude and Helen?
11. What does the subject of Maud's childhood illness add to the story?
12. Throughout her life, but especially once her sister Sukey goes missing, Maud collects random, found objects. In what various ways do physical objects come to possess meaning or value?
13. Of what particular significance to the novel is the detail of Maud collecting "boxes full of disintegrating bees and wasps and beetles"?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Emporium of Imagination

Tabitha Bird

About This Book

This beautiful and uplifting story will make you laugh and make you cry. Welcome to The Emporium of Imagination, a most unusual shop that travels the world offering vintage gifts to repair broken dreams and extraordinary phones to contact lost loved ones. But, on arrival in the tiny township of Boonah, the store's long-time custodian, Earlatidge Hubert Umbray, makes a shocking realisation. He is dying . . .

The clock is now ticking to find his replacement, because the people of Boonah are clearly in need of some restorative magic.

Like Enoch Rayne – a heartbroken ten-year-old boy mourning the loss of his father, while nurturing a guilty secret. Like Ann Harlow, who has come to the town to be close to her dying grandmother. Though it's Enoch's father who dominates her thoughts - and regrets.

Even Earlatidge in his final days will experience the store as never before - and have the chance to face up to his own tragedy.

About The Author

In a bayside suburb of Queensland, Australia, Tabitha Bird grew up in a garden. It wasn't much of a garden, but she told stories to ferns and weeds alike and gave herself something to hope in that was bigger than she was. Eventually, she had to leave the garden and do responsible things like grow up. When her own children came along, she read stories with gumption and wild joy and got to thinking that perhaps she had some of her own to tell. The first whispering of story she heard was from a forgotten child that lived in that long-ago garden. Together with her family she moved to Boonah, Australia, where her novel is set. Her Chihuahua, husband and three sons are all the reason she needs to believe there is still magic in this world.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

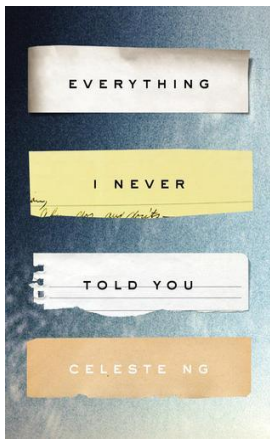
Discussion Questions

1. What was your favourite part of the book?
2. What was your least favourite?
3. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
4. Which scene has stuck with you the most?
5. What did you think of the writing? Are there any standout sentences?
6. Did you reread any passages? If so, which ones?
7. Would you want to read another book by this author?
8. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
9. What surprised you most about the book?
10. How did your opinion of the book change as you read it?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Everything I Never Told You

Celeste Ng

About This Book

So begins this exquisite novel about a Chinese American family living in 1970s small-town Ohio. Lydia is the favorite child of Marilyn and James Lee, and her parents are determined that she will fulfill the dreams they were unable to pursue. But when Lydia's body is found in the local lake, the delicate balancing act that has been keeping the Lee family together is destroyed, tumbling them into chaos.

A profoundly moving story of family, secrets, and longing, *Everything I Never Told You* is both a gripping page-turner and a sensitive family portrait, uncovering the ways in which mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and husbands and wives struggle, all their lives, to understand one another.

About the Author

Celeste Ng is a writer in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

(It's pronounced "-ing.")

Her debut novel, [*Everything I Never Told You*](#), has won multiple awards and was a *New York Times* bestseller, Amazon's #1 Best Book of 2014, and on the Best Book of the Year lists of over a dozen outlets.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

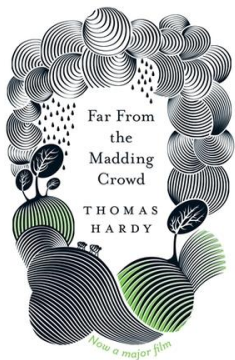
Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the relationships between Nath, Lydia, and Hannah. How do the siblings both understand and mystify one another?
2. Why do you think Lydia is the favorite child of James and Marilyn? How does this pressure affect Lydia, and what kind of impact do you think it has on Nath and Hannah? Do you think it is more difficult for Lydia to be the favorite, or for Nath and Hannah, who are often overlooked by their parents?
3. “So part of him wanted to tell Nath that he knew: what it was like to be teased, what it was like to never fit in. The other part of him wanted to shake his son, to slap him. To shape him into something different.... When Marilyn asked what happened, James said merely, with a wave of the hand, 'Some kids teased him at the pool yesterday. He needs to learn to take a joke.’”
4. How did you react to the “Marco Polo” pool scene with James and Nath? What do you think of James’s decision?
5. Discuss a situation in which you’ve felt like an outsider. How do the members of the Lee family deal with being measured against stereotypes and others’ perceptions?
6. What is the meaning of the novel’s title? To whom do the “I” and “you” refer?
7. What would have happened if Lydia had reached the dock? Do you think she would have been able to change her parents’ views and expectations of her?
8. This novel says a great deal about the influence our parents can have on us. Do you think the same issues will affect the next generation of Lees? How did your parents influence your childhood?
9. “It struck her then, as if someone had said it aloud: her mother was dead, and the only thing worth remembering about her, in the end, was that she cooked. Marilyn thought uneasily of her own life, of hours spent making breakfasts, serving dinners, packing lunches into neat paper bags.”
10. Discuss the relationship Marilyn and her mother have to cooking and their roles as stay-at-home mothers. Do you think one is happier or more satisfied?
11. The footprint on the ceiling brings Nath and Lydia closer when they are young, and later, Hannah and James discover it together and laugh. What other objects bring the characters closer together or drive them further apart?
12. There’s so much that the characters keep to themselves. What do you wish they had shared with one another? Do you think an ability to better express themselves would have changed the outcome of the book?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Far From the Madding Crowd

Thomas Hardy

About This Book

Independent and spirited Bathsheba Everdene has come to Weatherbury to take up her position as a farmer on the largest estate in the area. Her bold presence draws three very different suitors: the gentleman-farmer Boldwood, soldier-seducer Sergeant Troy and the devoted shepherd Gabriel Oak. Each, in contrasting ways, unsettles her decisions and complicates her life, and tragedy ensues, threatening the stability of the whole community. The first of his works set in Wessex, Hardy's novel of swift passion and slow courtship is imbued with his evocative descriptions of rural life and landscapes, and with unflinching honesty about sexual relationships.

About The Author

Thomas Hardy, OM, was an English author of the naturalist movement, although in several poems he displays elements of the previous romantic and enlightenment periods of literature, such as his fascination with the supernatural. He regarded himself primarily as a poet and composed novels mainly for financial gain. The bulk of his work, set mainly in the semi-fictional land of Wessex, delineates characters struggling against their passions and circumstances. Hardy's poetry, first published in his 50s, has come to be as well regarded as his novels, especially after The Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The term **cliffhanger** is considered to have originated with Thomas Hardy's serial novel [A Pair of Blue Eyes](#) in 1873. In the novel, Hardy chose to leave one of his protagonists, Knight, literally hanging off a cliff staring into the stony eyes of a trilobite embedded in the rock that has been dead for millions of years. This became the archetypal — and literal — cliff-hanger of Victorian prose.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

Discussion Questions

1. According to the scholar Howard Babb, Hardy

y's depiction of Wessex "impinges upon the consciousness of the reader in many ways . . . as mere setting, or a symbol, or as a being in its own right." How does environment serve as an integral part of this novel?

2. The title of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, borrowed from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," celebrates the "cool, sequestered" lives of rural folks. Is the title ironic or appropriate?

3. The rustics who work the land, tend the sheep, and gather at Warren's malt house have been likened to a Greek chorus. Can you support this analogy? What function do the rustics serve in the novel?

4. Time is a theme that weaves throughout the story. One example may be found in Chapter XVI, when Frank Troy stands rigidly in All Saints Church awaiting Fanny's delayed arrival while a "grotesque clockwork" agonizingly marks each passing moment. Where else does Hardy employ the theme of time, and what purpose does it serve?

5. In Chapter IV, Bathsheba tells Gabriel, "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent: and you would never be able to, I know." How is Bathsheba "tamed" over the course of the novel, and who is responsible for her transformation?

6. How does the subordinate plot concerning Fanny Robin and Sergeant Troy serve as a contrast to the main storyline?

7. What do Bathsheba Everdene and Fanny Robin have in common, and how do they differ? And what does Hardy's portrayal of these two women reveal about Victorian moral standards?

8. In Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Troy, and Farmer Boldwood, Hardy has depicted three very different suitors in pursuit of Bathsheba Everdene. What distinguishes each of these characters, and what values does each of them represent?

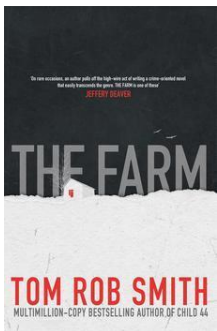
9. Two particular episodes in *Far from the Madding Crowd* are often cited for their profound sensuality: Sergeant Troy's seduction of Bathsheba through swordplay (Chapter XXVIII), and Gabriel's sheep-shearing scene (Chapter XXII). What elements does Hardy employ to make these scenes so powerful?

10. At the end of the novel, Hardy describes the remarkable bond between Gabriel and Bathsheba: "Theirs was that substantial affection which arises . . . when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard, prosaic reality." How does this relationship serve as a contrast to other examples of love and courtship throughout the novel? Consider Bathsheba and her three suitors, as well as Fanny Robin and Sergeant Troy. (*Questions from the Random House-Modern Classics edition.*)



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Farm

Tom Rob Smith

About This Book

If you refuse to believe me, I will no longer consider you my son.

Daniel believed that his parents were enjoying a peaceful retirement on a remote farm in Sweden. But with a single phone call, everything changes.

Your mother...she's not well, his father tells him. She's been imagining things—terrible, terrible things. She's had a psychotic breakdown and been committed to a mental hospital.

Before Daniel can board a plane to Sweden, his mother calls: Everything that man has told you is a lie. I'm not mad... I need the police... Meet me at Heathrow.

Caught between his parents, and unsure of who to believe or trust, Daniel becomes his mother's unwilling judge and jury as she tells him an urgent tale of secrets, of lies, of a crime and a conspiracy that implicates his own father.

About the Author

Tom Rob Smith was born in London in 1979. He attended Cambridge University where he received his B.A. – Education, graduating in 2001. He has won numerous awards including The ITW Thriller Award, Best First Novel, CWA Steel Dagger Award. After finishing university, he travelled to Italy for 12 months on a creative writing scholarship. He has written scripts and storylines for British Television as well as working on Cambodia's first ever soap opera while living in Phnom Penh. He is currently living in London.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

Discussion Questions

1. What were the themes of the book? Do you feel they were adequately explored? Were they brought to life in a cliché or in a unique manner?
2. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
3. What surprised you the most about the book?
4. Did any of the characters remind you of yourself or someone you know? How?
5. What is motivating the actions of the characters in the story? What do the sub-characters want from the main character and what does the main character want with them?
6. How did the "roles" of the various characters influence their interactions? I.e. For a woman: Mother, daughter, sister, wife, lover, professional, etc.
7. Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters? What would you have done differently?
8. What past influences are shaping the actions of the characters in the story?
9. Did you think the ending was appropriate? How would you have liked to have seen the ending go?
10. How have the characters changed by the end of the book?
11. Have any of YOUR views or thoughts changed after reading this book?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Fight Like a Girl

Clementine Ford

About This Book

Online sensation, fearless feminist heroine and scourge of trolls and misogynists everywhere, Clementine Ford is a beacon of hope and inspiration to thousands of Australian women and girls. Her incendiary debut *Fight Like A Girl* is an essential manifesto for feminists new, old and soon-to-be, and exposes just how unequal the world continues to be for women. Crucially, it is a call to arms for all women to rediscover the fury that has been suppressed by a society that still considers feminism a threat.

Fight Like A Girl will make you laugh, cry and scream. But above all it will make you demand and fight for a world in which women have real equality and not merely the illusion of it.

About the Author

Ford grew up in Adelaide, South Australia. She studied at the University of Adelaide, where she took a gender studies course; she describes this as a personal catalyst for her decision to become a women's rights activist. During her time at the university she also worked as an editor and contributor for the student newspaper *On Dit*. In September 2016, Allen & Unwin published Ford's first book, *Fight Like a Girl*.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

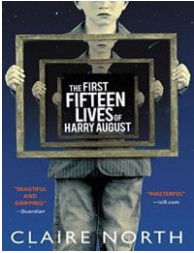
Discussion Questions

1. If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ... What observations are made in the book?
 - Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
 - Does the author criticize or admire the culture? Does he/she wish to preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained?
 - What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing, or difficult to understand?
2. What is the central idea discussed in the book? What issues or ideas does the author explore? Are they personal, sociological, global, political, economic, spiritual, medical, or scientific?
3. Do the issues affect your life? How so - directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?
4. What evidence does the author use to support the book's ideas? Is the evidence convincing...definitive or...speculative? Does the author depend on personal opinion, observation, and assessment? Or is the evidence factual based on science, statistics, historical documents, or quotations from (credible) experts?
5. What kind of language does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?
6. What are the implications for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the issues raised in the book? Are they positive or negative...affirming or frightening?
7. What solutions does the author propose? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?
8. How controversial are the issues raised in the book? Who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?
9. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
10. What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective about a difficult issue—personal or societal? Has it introduced you to a culture in another country...or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August

Claire North

About This Book

Some stories cannot be told in just one lifetime. Harry August is on his deathbed. Again. No matter what he does or the decisions he makes, when death comes, Harry always returns to where he began, a child with all the knowledge of a life he has already lived a dozen times before. Nothing ever changes. Until now. As Harry nears the end of his eleventh life, a little girl appears at his bedside. "I nearly missed you, Doctor August," she says. "I need to send a message." This is the story of what Harry does next, and what he did before, and how he tries to save a past he cannot change and a future he cannot allow.

About The Author

Claire North is Catherine Webb, a Carnegie Medal-nominated young-adult novel author whose first book, *Mirror Dreams*, was written when she was just 14 years old. She went on to write seven more successful YA novels.

Claire North is a pseudonym for adult fantasy books written by Catherine Webb, who also writes under the pseudonym Kate Griffin.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

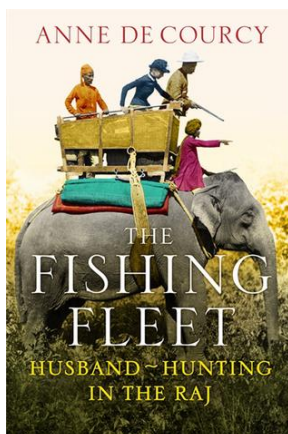
Discussion Questions

1. What do you think that Harry learnt through the process of living his life over and over again?
2. What does the novel tell us about the nature of good and evil?
3. Do you think it is human nature to want to change the world?
4. What would you do if you had to live your life over again?
5. What do you think of the concept of parallel universes? Intriguing? Horrifying? Incomprehensible? Exciting?
6. Sometimes the need to share a regret or a secret with a stranger is very strong. The need to tell. "Private Harry Brookes poured his heart out to a distant stranger who made no reply, but I knew that what I needed was not so much the comfort of return, but to speak of what I had been. The telling was all, the reply merely a courtesy." page 89. Have you ever felt like Harry, that the telling was all?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Fishing Fleet: Husband Hunting In the Raj

Anne De Courcy

About This Book

From the late 19th century, when the Raj was at its height, many of Britain's best and brightest young men went out to India to work as administrators, soldiers and businessmen. With the advent of steam travel and the opening of the Suez Canal, countless young women, suffering at the lack of eligible men in Britain, followed in their wake. They were known as the Fishing Fleet, and this book is their story.

About the Author

Anne de Courcy is a writer, journalist, and book reviewer. In the 1970s she was Woman's Editor on the London Evening News until its demise in 1980, when she joined the Evening Standard as a columnist and feature-writer. In 1982 she joined the Daily Mail as a feature writer, with a special interest in historical subjects, leaving in 2003 to concentrate on books, on which she has talked widely both here and in the United States.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

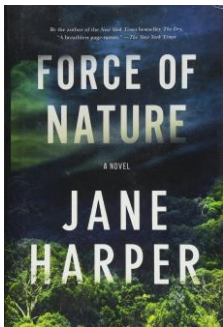
Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why? Did you find yourself amused, intrigued, enthralled, disturbed, fearful, irritated, angered, or impatient?
2. Which characters do you admire or dislike and why? What are their primary characteristics; how would you describe them?
3. What motivates the actions of a given character? To what degree does the character's past play a role in her present actions? Are those actions justified or ethical?
4. Do any characters grow or change over the course of the novel?
5. Is the story well developed?
6. What central ideas might the author be exploring-the novel's themes? Consider ideas about the nature of love, the requirements of goodness, the meaning of justice, the burden of the past...basic human issues that are at stake in the book.
7. Is the novel plot-driven? In other words, does the plot unfold quickly, focusing more on action than on the inner lives of the characters? Which do you prefer?
8. Is the plot well developed? Is it believable...or is it forced? Is it suspenseful or more contemplative? Does it unfold naturally, or do you feel manipulated along the way by coincidences, odd plot twists, or cliff-hangers?
9. Is the ending satisfying? Predictable or not? Does it wrap up the ends neatly? Is it too neat, too pat? Does it leave some issues unresolved, questions unanswered? If you could change the ending, would you...if so, how would you change it?
10. What central ideas might the author be exploring-the novel's themes? Consider ideas about the nature of love, the requirements of goodness, the meaning of justice, the burden of the past...basic human issues that are at stake in the book.



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Force of Nature

Jane Harper

About This Book

Five women reluctantly pick up their backpacks and start walking along the muddy track. Only four come out the other side.

The hike through the rugged Giralang Ranges is meant to take the office colleagues out of their air-conditioned comfort zone and teach resilience and team building. At least that is what the corporate retreat website advertises but far from encouraging teamwork, the trek creates suspicion, violence and disintegrating trust.

But Federal Police Agent Aaron Falk has a particularly keen interest in the whereabouts of the missing bushwalker and is determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.

About The Author

Jane was born in the UK and moved to Australia with her family at age eight.

Returning to the UK with her family as a teenager, she studied English and History at the University of Kent in Canterbury. On graduating, she got her first reporting job on the *Darlington & Stockton Times* in County Durham.

Jane moved back to Australia in 2008 where she worked first on the *Geelong Advertiser*, and in 2011 took up a role with the *Herald Sun* in Melbourne.

In 2014, Jane submitted a short story which was one of 12 chosen for the *Big Issue's* annual Fiction Edition. This inspired her to pursue creative writing more seriously, breaking through with *The Dry* at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards in 2015. Her books have won numerous awards.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

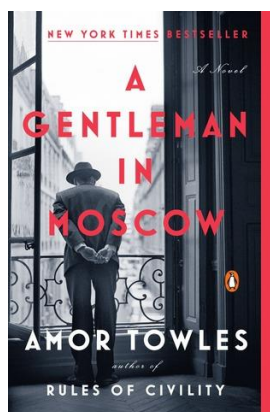
Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why?
2. Which characters do you admire or dislike and why? What are their primary characteristics; how would you describe them?
3. Do any characters grow or change over the course of the novel?
4. Is the story well developed?
5. A good ending is essential in any mystery or crime thriller: it should ease up on tension, answer questions, and tidy up loose ends. Does the ending in this book accomplish these goals?
6. Overall, does the book satisfy? Does it live up to the standards of a good crime story or suspense thriller? Why or why not?
7. Which character in the book group do you most relate to and why?
8. Would you be tempted to read another book by this author? Why or why not?
9. Did the book's pace seem too fast, too slow or just right?
10. What did you think of the book's length? If it's too long, what part would you cut? If too short, what would you add?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



A Gentleman in Moscow

Amor Towles

About This Book

In 1922, Count Alexander Rostov is deemed an unrepentant aristocrat by a Bolshevik tribunal, and is sentenced to house arrest in the Metropol, a grand hotel across the street from the Kremlin. Rostov, an indomitable man of erudition and wit, has never worked a day in his life, and must now live in an attic room while some of the most tumultuous decades in Russian history are unfolding outside the hotel's doors. Unexpectedly, his reduced circumstances provide him entry into a much larger world of emotional discovery.

About the Author

Born and raised in the Boston area, Amor Towles graduated from Yale College and received an MA in English from Stanford University. Having worked as an investment professional in Manhattan for over twenty years, he now devotes himself fulltime to writing. His first novel, *Rules of Civility*, published in 2011, was a New York Times bestseller in both hardcover and paperback and was ranked by the Wall Street Journal as one of the best books of 2011. The book was optioned by Lionsgate to be made into a feature film and its French translation received the 2012 Prix Fitzgerald. His second novel, *A Gentleman in Moscow*, published in 2016, was also a New York Times bestseller and was ranked as one of the best books of 2016 by the Chicago Tribune, the Miami Herald, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the St. Louis Dispatch, and NPR. Both novels have been translated into over fifteen languages.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL



Discussion Questions

- 1) Over the course of Book Two, why does the Count decide to throw himself from the roof of the Metropol? On the verge of doing so, why does the encounter with the old handyman lead him to change his plans?
- 2) The Count's life under house arrest is greatly influenced by his relationship with four women: Nina, Marina, Anna, and Sofia. What is the nature of the Count's relationship with each of these women? How do those relationships differ from his relationship with the members of the Triumvirate—Andrey and Emile?
- 3) The majority of *A Gentleman in Moscow* is told in the third person from the Count's point of view. There is, however, an overarching narrator with a perspective different from the Count's. Initially, this narrator appears in footnotes, then in the "Addendums," then in the historical introductions of "1930," "1938," and "1946." How would you characterize this narrator? How does he differ from the Count in terms of his point of view and tone of voice? What is his role in the narrative?
- 4) In the "1946" chapter, Mishka, Osip, and Richard each share with the Count his perspective on the meaning of the revolutionary era. What are these three perspectives? Are you inclined to agree with one of them; or do you find there is some merit to each?
- 5) How does the narrative incorporate the passage of time, and does it do so effectively? Thematically speaking, how does the Count's experience of Time change over the course of the novel and how does it relate to his father's views as embodied by the twice-tolling clock? What does the novel suggest about the influence of individuals on history and vice versa?
- 6) At the opening of Book Five, the Count has already decided to get Sofia out of Russia. What occurs over the course of Book Four to lead him to this decision? Why does he choose to remain behind?
- 7) Near the novel's conclusion, what is the significance of the toppled cocktail glass in Casablanca?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes

The German Midwife

Mandy Robotham



About This Book

Germany, 1944. A prisoner in the camps, Anke Hoff is doing what she can to keep her pregnant campmates and their newborns alive. But when Anke's work is noticed, she is chosen for a task more dangerous than she could ever have imagined. Eva Braun is pregnant with the Fuhrer's child, and Anke is assigned as her midwife. Before long, Anke is faced with an impossible choice. Does she serve the Reich she loathes and keep the baby alive? Or does she sacrifice an innocent child for the good of a broken world.

About The Author

Mandy Robotham Originally from Tottenham in North London has been an aspiring author from the age of nine, but was waylaid by journalism and later enticed by birth. She's now a former midwife who writes about birth, death, love and everything else in between. She graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from Oxford Brookes University.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

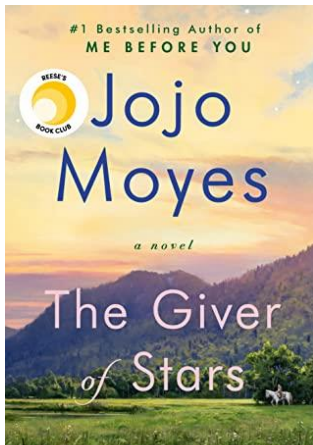
Discussion Questions

1. The premise of the book is from the point of view of German citizens and their survival; did it make you think about their stance in the war, and their positions as Germans and anti-Nazis? Did it make you feel more empathy with ordinary Germans?
2. The book describes childbirth as being virtually timeless in being a constant process – with all the technology we have in the modern world, do Anke’s descriptions and experiences transfer to modern-day life, in the way she feels? Are the emotions of motherhood also unchanged over centuries?
3. This story of Eva’s pregnancy is fictional – how do you feel about a writer merging fact with fiction? Does it make you want to explore the true history behind the real-life characters?
4. Equally, the depiction of women’s experiences in German concentration camps was starkly cruel – did it make you think about the day-to-day lives of prisoners in the lesser-known camps, how women especially survived?
5. Being true to yourself is a key theme in Anke’s experiences and throughout the book – do you think we can truly relate to life and death decisions in the (largely) peacetime world we live in? Can we relate to her emotions with our daily struggles between right and wrong?
6. Anke and Dieter’s attraction and love comes to ignore prejudice. Can a deep feeling for one person make you overlook something that seems, at first, a core part of their character?
7. Did you feel the outcome for Dieter and Anke was the most realistic in the circumstances? Can you imagine what would their life have been like together in a post-war world?
8. Some readers don’t like an epilogue and prefer endings to be part of the mystery. Did the epilogue make the story complete for you as a reader, or would you have preferred to create your own future for the characters?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Giver of Stars

Jojo Moyes

About This Book

Set in the Depression-era America, a breathtaking story of five extraordinary women and their remarkable journey through the mountains of Kentucky and beyond.

Based on a true story rooted in America's past, *The Giver of Stars* is unparalleled in its scope and epic in its storytelling. Funny, heartbreaking, enthralling, it is destined to become a modern classic—a richly rewarding novel of women's friendship, of true love, and of what happens when we reach beyond our grasp for the great beyond.

About the Author

Pauline Sara Jo Moyes (born 4 August 1969), known professionally as Jojo Moyes, is an English journalist and, since 2002, a romance novelist and screenwriter. She is one of only a few authors to have twice won the Romantic Novel of the Year Award by the Romantic Novelists' Association and has been translated into twenty-eight languages.

Moyes lives on a farm in Great Sampford, Essex, with her husband, journalist Charles Arthur, and their three children. She enjoys riding her ex-racehorse, Brian, as well as tending to the numerous animals on her family's farm.

citylibraries

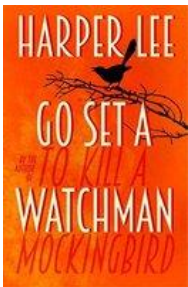
 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. Let us talk about why Alice married Bennett. What kind of life did she expect in America? And how did it compare to her reality?
2. Life in rural Kentucky in the '30s was definitely not for the faint of heart. How do you think you would have handled it if you were Alice? Would you have stayed or gone back to England?
3. Why did Alice decide to join these librarians on their quest?
4. Why was it so important for these librarians to share literacy with rural residents?
5. Let us talk about Margery! She is tough as nails but has a soft spot for the other librarians, especially for Alice. Let us talk about how her background shaped who she became. Why was she so resistant on marrying Sven?
6. How did Margery change from the beginning of the story and to the end?
7. Margery goes to jail for the murder of Clem McCullough. Were you surprised his daughter ended up helping Margery to get out of jail?
8. What did you think about the ending for all the characters?
9. Why was rural Kentucky the right place all along for Alice?
10. What are the key themes and takeaways from this novel?

Book Club Reading Notes



Go Set a Watchman

Harper Lee

About This Book

From Harper Lee comes a landmark new novel set two decades after her beloved Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Maycomb, Alabama. Twenty-six-year-old Jean Louise Finch—"Scout"—returns home from New York City to visit her aging father, Atticus. Set against the backdrop of the civil rights tensions and political turmoil that were transforming the South, Jean Louise's homecoming turns bittersweet when she learns disturbing truths about her close-knit family, the town, and the people dearest to her. Memories from her childhood flood back, and her values and assumptions are thrown into doubt. Featuring many of the iconic characters from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Go Set a Watchman* perfectly captures a young woman, and a world, in painful yet necessary transition out of the illusions of the past—a journey that can only be guided by one's own conscience. Written in the mid-1950s, *Go Set a Watchman* imparts a fuller, richer understanding and appreciation of Harper Lee. Here is an unforgettable novel of wisdom, humanity, passion, humor, and effortless precision—a profoundly affecting work of art that is both wonderfully evocative of another era and relevant to our own times. It not only confirms the enduring brilliance of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but also serves as its essential companion, adding depth, context, and new meaning to an American classic.

About the Author

Harper Lee, known as Nelle, was born in the Alabama town of Monroeville, the youngest of four children of Amasa Coleman Lee and Frances Cunningham Finch Lee. Her father, a former newspaper editor and proprietor, was a lawyer who served on the state legislature from 1926 to 1938. Having written several long stories, Harper Lee located an agent in November 1956. Working with J. B. Lippincott & Co. editor Tay Hohoff, she completed *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the summer of 1959. Published July 11, 1960, the novel was an immediate bestseller and won great critical acclaim, including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1961. It remains a bestseller with more than 30 million copies in print. In 1999, it was voted "Best Novel of the Century" in a poll by the Library Journal.

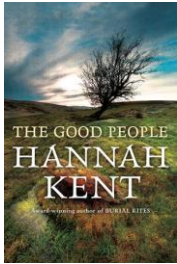
Discussion Questions

1. *Go Set a Watchman* takes place more than twenty years after *To Kill a Mockingbird* begins. When *Watchman* opens, Jean Louise Finch—now twenty-six and living in the North, in New York City—is returning to her hometown of Maycomb, Alabama. Describe the Maycomb of *Go Set a Watchman*. If you have read *Mockingbird*, has the town changed in the intervening years? If so, how?
2. “Integrity, humour, and patience were the three words for Atticus Finch.” After your reading of *Watchman*, do these three words still hold true? What words would you use to describe him?
3. Why does Maycomb have a citizens’ council, and why does this upset Jean Louise when she discovers that nearly everyone in town belongs to it? By allowing the likes of a racist segregationist like Grady O’Hanlon to speak at the meeting, are Atticus and Henry defending O’Hanlon’s First Amendment right to free speech—or are they condoning his message?
4. What kind of reception does Jean Louise receive in the Quarters when she visits Calpurnia, the Finches’ retired housekeeper? How does Calpurnia react to seeing Jean Louise, and what is Calpurnia’s response when Jean Louise asks her how she truly felt about her family? Would Calpurnia have answered the same way if asked that question a few years earlier—or if asked a few years later?
5. *Go Set a Watchman* was written three years after the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education*. How did that decision impact the nation and especially the South? What is Jean Louise’s opinion of that decision? What about Atticus’s? How do their responses reflect comments about Supreme Court decisions involving minority rights in our own time? What does this tell us about ourselves as Americans and about our views of race today?
6. Consider the novel’s title, *Go Set a Watchman*. What is its significance? Why do you think Harper Lee chose this as her title for the book? Though it is fiction, the book is a historical document of its time. What does reading it tell us about the modern Civil Rights movement and its effect on the South? What lessons does the book offer us in understanding our own turbulent times?
7. Late in the novel, Uncle Jack tells his niece, “Every man’s island, Jean Louise, every man’s watchman, is his conscience.” What wisdom is he imparting to her? Uncle Jack also calls Jean Louise a “turnip-sized bigot.” Is she? Why?
8. Did reading *Go Set a Watchman* deepen your understanding of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? How are the two books linked thematically? Talk about the experience of reading *Go Set a Watchman*. Does it stand as a companion to *Mockingbird*?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Good People

Hannah Kent

About This Book

Hedged in by gossip and joined by their desperation, three women in nineteenth-century Ireland are drawn together in the hope of rescuing a child from a superstitious community, determined to rid itself of the strange and unknowable. Bereft after the loss of her husband, Nora finds herself alone and caring for her young grandson Michael--a boy whom she recalls as having been a happy and healthy infant but now, in the wake of both his mother's and grandfather's deaths, can neither speak nor walk. Mary, a servant girl from more rural parts, comes to the valley to help Nora just as the rumors are spreading: the talk of unexplained misfortunes and illnesses, and the theory that deformed Michael is a changeling, a fairy child to blame for the bad luck the valley has endured since his arrival.

About The Author

Hannah Kent was born in Adelaide in 1985. Her first novel, the international bestseller, *Burial Rites* (2013), was translated into 28 languages and was shortlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction (formerly the Orange Prize) and the Guardian First Book Award. It won the ABIA Literary Fiction Book of the Year, the Indie Awards Debut Fiction Book of the Year and the Victorian Premier's People's Choice Award, and was shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Hannah's second novel, *The Good People* was published in 2016 (ANZ) and 2017 (Feb, UK; Sept, North America). It was shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, the Indie Book Award for Fiction and the ABIA Literary Fiction Book of the Year. Hannah is also the co-founder and publishing director of Australian literary publication *Kill Your Darlings*.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

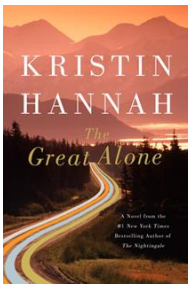
Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the title? Would you have given the book a different title? If yes, what is your title?
2. What were the themes of the book? Do you feel they were adequately explored? Were they brought to life in a cliché or in a unique manner?
3. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
4. What scene was the most pivotal for the book? How do you think the story would have changed had that scene not taken place?
5. What scene resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way? Why?
6. Has anything ever happened to you similar to what happened in the book? How did you react to it differently?
7. What surprised you the most about the book?
8. Were there any notable racial, cultural, traditions, gender, sexuality or socioeconomic factors at play in the book? If so, what? How did it effect the characters? Do you think they were realistically portrayed?
9. How important is the setting & time period to the story? How would it have played out differently in a different setting? What about a different time period?
10. Were there any particular quotes that stood out to you? Why?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Great Alone

Kristin Hannah

About This Book

In this unforgettable portrait of human frailty and resilience, Kristin Hannah reveals the indomitable character of the modern American pioneer and the spirit of a vanishing Alaska—a place of incomparable beauty and danger. *The Great Alone* is a daring, beautiful, stay-up-all-night story about love and loss, the fight for survival, and the wildness that lives in both man and nature.

About The Author

Kristin Hannah is the award-winning and bestselling author of more than 20 novels including the international blockbuster, *The Nightingale*, which was named Goodreads Best Historical fiction novel for 2015 and won the coveted People's Choice award for best fiction in the same year. Additionally, it was named a Best Book of the Year by Amazon, iTunes, BuzzFeed, the Wall Street Journal, Paste, and The Week.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

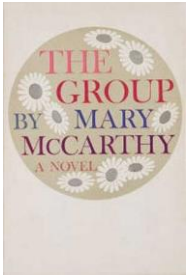
Discussion Questions

1. Before reading the book, what was your perception of life in Alaska? What surprised you?
2. The wild, spectacular beauty of Alaska. It was otherworldly somehow, magical in its vast expanse, an incomparable landscape of soaring glacier-filled white mountains that ran the length of the horizon, knife-tip points pressed high into a cloudless, cornflower blue sky." (22) The author describes the Alaskan landscape with such electric language—what passages did you find the most moving? Did they help you visualize the place or inspire you? Did you find the landscape to be in contrast to the violence of the story? Or do you think it complemented the breathtaking feeling of young love?
3. What aspects of the lifestyle would you find the most challenging in the wild? How would you handle the isolation, the interdependence among neighbors, the climate? Would you have what it takes to survive?
4. Did you find Cora's actions and liberated" mind-set to be in conflict? When we first meet Cora she's venting about discriminatory credit practices at the bank while sipping from a feminist-messaged coffee cup, but we soon discover she's at a tense crossroads in her personal life. What do you think holds her back?
5. Leni sees the complexity of her parents' relationship when in such close quarters with them in the cabin—the rawness of their lives together. Did you think it was going to be the weather or the violence that killed them first?
6. Discuss the forms of love within this book—crazy and romantic love, neighborly love and compassion, love for the natural world, and a mother's love. What else would you add?
7. Did you see Cora's explosive act of protection coming? What did it feel like to read that scene? As a parent, do you think you'd be capable of the same act, or be able to write such a confessional letter?
8. Did you hold Leni responsible in your mind for any of Matthew's misfortune? Why or why not? How does Leni show her devotion in the end? Did you anticipate the kind of future that is set in motion for them at the close of the book?
9. At the end of the story, Leni ends up back in Alaska—do you think there's an ultimate place where people belong? How would you know if you got there?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Group

Mary McCarthy

About This Book

Mary McCarthy's most celebrated novel portrays the lives of eight Vassar graduates, known simply to their classmates as "the group." An eclectic mix of personalities and upbringings, they meet a week after graduation to watch Kay Strong, the first of the group, be married. After the ceremony, the women begin their adult lives--traveling to Europe, tackling the world of nursing and publishing, and finding love and heartbreak in the streets of New York City. Through the years, some of the friends grow apart and some become more entangled in each other's affairs, but all vow not to become like their mothers and fathers. It is only when one of them passes away that they all come back together again to mourn the loss of a friend, a confidante, and most importantly, a member of the group.

About The Author

Mary McCarthy (1912–1989) was an American literary critic and author of more than two dozen books including the 1963 New York Times bestseller *The Group*. Born in Seattle, McCarthy studied at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, and graduated in 1933. After moving to New York City, McCarthy became known for her incisive writing as a contributor to publications such as the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, and the *New York Review of Books*. Her debut novel, *The Company She Keeps* (1942), initiated her ascent to become one of the most celebrated writers of her generation, a reputation bolstered by the publication of her autobiography *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* in 1957, as well as that of her now-classic novel *The Group*.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

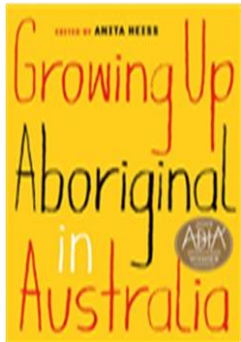
Discussion Questions

1. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
2. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
3. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
4. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
5. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
6. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
7. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
8. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Growing Up Aboriginal

Anita Heiss

About This Book

Childhood stories of family, country and belonging

What is it like to grow up Aboriginal in Australia? This anthology, compiled by award-winning author Anita Heiss, showcases many diverse voices, experiences and stories in order to answer that question.

Accounts from well-known authors and high-profile identities sit alongside those from newly discovered writers of all ages. All the contributors speak from the heart – sometimes calling for empathy, oftentimes challenging stereotypes, always demanding respect.

This ground-breaking collection from the Growing Up series will enlighten, inspire and educate about the lives of Aboriginal people in Australia today.

About the Author

Dr Anita Heiss is the author of non-fiction, historical fiction, commercial women's fiction, poetry, social commentary and travel articles. She is a Lifetime Ambassador of the Indigenous Literacy Foundation and a proud member of the Wiradjuri nation of central NSW. Anita was a finalist in the 2012 Human Rights Awards and the 2013 Australian of the Year Awards. She lives in Brisbane.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

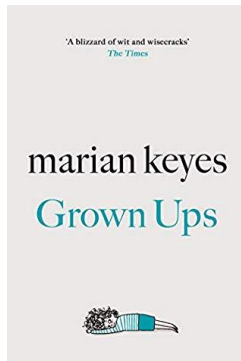
Discussion Questions

1. What have you learned after reading this book of over 50 Short essays?
2. Has it broadened your perspective about Aboriginal peoples?
3. Has it introduced you to a culture or an ethnic or regional culture in your own country?
4. What surprised you the most about the book?
5. Was there an essay that resonated most with you? Why?
6. Were there any notable racial, cultural, traditions, gender, sexuality or socioeconomic factors at play in the book? If so, what?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Grown Ups

Marian Keyes

About This Book

They are a glamorous family, the Casey's.

Johnny Casey, his two brothers Ed and Liam, their beautiful, talented wives and all their kids spend a lot of time together - birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, weekends away. And they are a happy family. Johnny's wife, Jessie - who has the most money - insists on it.

Under the surface, though, conditions are murkier. While some people clash, other people like each other far too much.

Everything stays under control until Ed's wife Cara, gets concussion and cannot keep her thoughts to herself. One careless remark at Johnny's birthday party, with the entire family present, starts Cara spilling out all their secrets.

In the subsequent unravelling, every one of the adults finds themselves wondering if it is time - finally - to grow up.

About the Author

Marian Keyes (born 10 September 1963) is an Irish novelist and non-fiction writer, best known for her work in women's literature. She is an Irish Book Awards winner. Over 22 million copies of her novels have been sold worldwide and her books have been translated into 32 languages. She became known worldwide for *Watermelon*, *Lucy Sullivan is Getting Married*, and *This Charming Man*, with themes including domestic violence and alcoholism.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

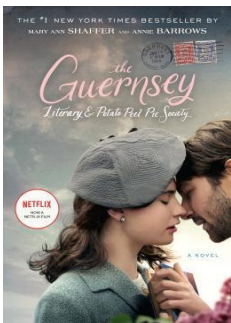
Discussion Questions

1. In the book Ed leaves Clara when she stops seeking medical help for her bulimia. Do you think this was the correct course of action for him to take? Why or why not?
2. Liam and Nell marry quickly, but separate after less than a year of marriage? Nell reflects that the marriage was never likely to last and that she entered it knowing it was not a forever marriage. What is your view of this attitude? Does it affect how you view Nell?
3. Who is your favourite character in the book and why?
4. Towards the end of the book Johnny claims that he never considered reigniting a romantic relationship with his ex-lover. Do you believe him? Why or why not?
5. Jess is very upset about her 50th birthday celebrations. To what extent do you think she is right to be angry and hurt?
6. Who has the most solid relationship in the book? Why?
7. After Rory died Jess' in-laws never forgave her for marrying his best friend. Why? How would you sum up the relationship between Jess, Rory and Johnny?
8. Does the menopause feature in 'Grown Ups'? If so, how and when? Is this question only acceptable coming from a middle-aged woman? Discuss!
9. How is the ability to communicate effectively shown as a key life skill in the book?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society

Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows

About This Book

A celebration of literature, love, and the power of the human spirit, this warm, funny, tender, and thoroughly entertaining novel is the story of an English author living in the shadow of World War II and the writing project that will dramatically change her life.

A moving tale of post-war friendship, love, and books, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society* is a captivating and completely irresistible novel of enormous depth and heart.

It's 1946, and as Juliet Ashton sits at her desk in her Chelsea flat, she is stumped. A writer of witty newspaper columns during the war, she can't think of what to write next. Out of the blue, she receives a letter from one Dawsey Adams of Guernsey - by chance he's acquired a book Juliet once owned - and, emboldened by their mutual love of books, they begin corresponding.

About The Author

Mary Ann Shaffer wrote *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* when she was a retired bookseller and librarian, in her seventies. She died in 2008, just before her book was published.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

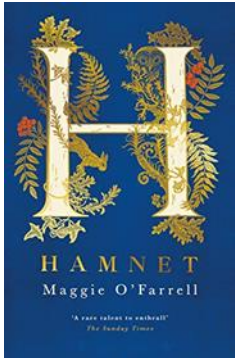
Discussion Questions

1. What makes Sidney and Sophie ideal friends for Juliet? What common ground do they share? Who has been a similar advocate in your life?
2. Dawsey first wrote to Juliet because books, on Charles Lamb or otherwise, were so difficult to obtain in Guernsey in the aftermath of the war. What differences did you note between bookselling in the novel and bookselling in your world? What makes book lovers unique, across all generations?
3. What were your first impressions of Dawsey? How was he different from the other men Juliet had known?
4. Discuss the poets, novelists, biographers, and other writers who capture the hearts of the members of the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society. What does a reader's taste in books say about his or her personality? Whose lives were changed the most by membership in the society.
5. Juliet occasionally receives mean-spirited correspondence from strangers, accusing both Elizabeth and Juliet of being immoral. What accounts for their judgmental ways?
6. In what ways were Juliet and Elizabeth kindred spirits? What did Elizabeth's spontaneous invention of the society, as well as her brave final act, say about her approach to life?
7. Numerous Guernsey residents give Juliet access to their private memories of the occupation. Which voices were most memorable for you? What was the effect of reading a variety of responses to a shared tragedy?
8. Kit and Juliet complete each other in many ways. What did they need from each other? What qualities make Juliet an unconventional, excellent mother?
9. How did Remy's presence enhance the lives of those on Guernsey? Through her survival, what recollections, hopes and lessons also survived?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Hamnet

Maggie O'Farrell

About This Book

Drawing on Maggie O'Farrell's long-term fascination with the little-known story behind Shakespeare's most enigmatic play, *HAMNET* is a luminous portrait of a marriage, at its heart the loss of a beloved child.

Warwickshire in the 1580s. Agnes is a woman as feared as she is sought after for her unusual gifts. She settles with her husband in Henley street, Stratford, and has three children: a daughter, Susanna, and then twins, Hamnet and Judith. The boy, Hamnet, dies in 1596, aged eleven. Four years or so later, the husband writes a play called Hamlet.

About the Author

Maggie O'Farrell (born 1972, Coleraine Northern Ireland) is a British author of contemporary fiction, who features in Waterstones' 25 Authors for the Future. It is possible to identify several common themes in her novels - the relationship between sisters is one, another is loss and the psychological impact of those losses on the lives of her characters.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

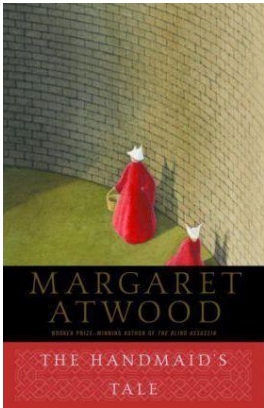
Discussion Questions

1. In Hamnet, Maggie O'Farrell does not ever call Agnes' husband Will or Shakespeare. Why do you think she chooses not to name him?
2. Agnes is presented as quite a strange woman who paid little attention to convention and respectability. She cured lots of people's illnesses with herbs and tinctures. How did this conform with or differ to your own perception of Anne Hathaway?
3. What is Agnes' interpretation of her husband's rationale behind playing the part of old King Hamlet's ghost? Were you convinced by Agnes' reading of events? If not, how did this affect your enjoyment of the story?
4. Maggie O'Farrell visited Stratford and the tourist spots linked to Shakespeare in order to be able to write authentically about Tudor England. How successfully does she bring Shakespeare's England to life? Give examples of what is effective?
5. "Dazzling, Devastating", "Flawless and furious". "Heart stopping, Hamnet does for the Shakespeare story what Jean Rhys does for Jane Eyre" are all quotations used in lieu of a blurb on the back of the book. What quotation would you add to these?
6. Feel free to joke around. I think Shakespeare would approve and Maggie O'Farrell probably would too!
7. In Maggie O'Farrell's retelling of Hamnet's story, Shakespeare's family seem to have little interest in or understanding of his writing? Discuss the significance of this?
8. Whilst we cannot ever know for sure what Shakespeare was like, how true is Maggie O'Farrell's characterisation of Shakespeare, in comparison to the image you have built up of him in your own mind?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Handmaids tale

Margaret Atwood

About This Book

Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. She may leave the home of the Commander and his wife once a day to walk to food markets whose signs are now pictures instead of words because women are no longer allowed to read. She must lie on her back once a month and pray that the Commander makes her pregnant, because in an age of declining births, Offred and the other Handmaids are valued only if their ovaries are viable. Offred can remember the years before, when she lived and made love with her husband, Luke; when she played with and protected her daughter; when she had a job, money of her own, and access to knowledge. But all of that is gone now...

About The Author

Throughout her writing career, Margaret Atwood has received numerous awards and honorary degrees. She is the author of more than thirty-five volumes of poetry, children's literature, fiction, and non-fiction and is perhaps best known for her novels, which include *The Edible Woman* (1970), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1983), *The Robber Bride* (1994), *Alias Grace* (1996), and *The Blind Assassin*, which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 2000. Atwood's dystopic novel, *Oryx and Crake*, was published in 2003. *The Tent* (mini-fictions) and *Moral Disorder* (short stories) both appeared in 2006. Her most recent volume of poetry, *The Door*, was published in 2007. Her non-fiction book, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* - in the Massey series, appeared in 2008, and her most recent novel, *The Year of the Flood*, in the autumn of 2009.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL



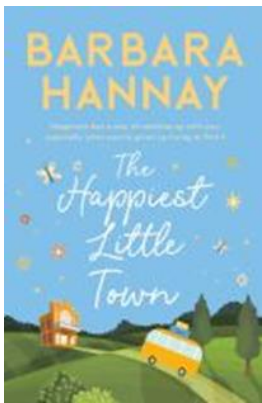
Discussion Questions

1. The novel begins with three epigraphs. What are their functions?
2. In Gilead, women are categorized as wives, handmaids, Marthas, or Aunts, but Moira refuses to fit into a niche. Offred says she was like an elevator with open sides who made them dizzy; she was their fantasy. Trace Moira's role throughout the tale to determine what she symbolizes.
3. Aunt Lydia, Janine, and Offred's mother also represent more than themselves. What do each of their characters connote? What do the style and color of their clothes symbolize?
4. At one level, *The Handmaid's Tale* is about the writing process. Atwood cleverly weaves this sub-plot into a major focus with remarks by Offred such as "Context is all, " and "I've filled it out for her," "I made that up," and "I wish this story were different." Does Offred's habit of talking about the process of storytelling make it easier or more difficult for you to suspend disbelief?
5. A palimpsest is a medieval parchment that scribes attempted to scrape clean and use again, though they were unable to obliterate all traces of the original. How does the new republic of Gilead's social order often resemble a palimpsest?
6. The Commander in the novel says you can't cheat nature. How do characters find ways to follow their natural instincts?
7. Why is the Bible under lock and key in Gilead?
8. Babies are referred to as "a keeper, "unbabies, " "shredders." What other real or fictional worlds do these terms suggest?
9. Atwood's title brings to mind titles from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Why might Atwood have wanted you to make that connection?
10. What do you feel the "Historical Notes" at the book's end add to the reading of this novel? What does the book's last line mean to you?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Happiest Little Town

Barbara Hannay

About This Book

Fourteen-year-old Tilly's world is torn apart when her single mother dies suddenly and she is sent a million miles from everything she has ever known to a small country town and a guardian who's a total stranger. In the picturesque mountains of Far North Queensland, Kate is trying to move on from a failed marriage by renovating a van and making plans for an exciting travel escape. The fresh start she so desperately craves is within reach when an unexpected responsibility lands on her doorstep. Olivia thinks she's found 'happy enough' until an accident changes everything. Ageing former celebrity actress Olivia is used to winning all the best roles in her local theatre group, but when she's injured while making a grand stage exit, she is relegated to the wings. Now she's determined that she won't bow out quietly and be left alone with the demons of her past.

About The Author

WINNER OF THE 2007 ROMANCE WRITERS OF AMERICA'S RITA AWARD

Multi award winning author, Barbara Hannay, is a city bred girl with a yen for country life. Most of her 50 plus books are set in rural and outback Australia and they've been enjoyed by readers around the world.

In her own version of life imitating art, Barbara and her husband currently live on a misty hillside in beautiful Far North Queensland where they keep heritage pigs, hens, ducks, turkeys and an untidy but productive garden.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

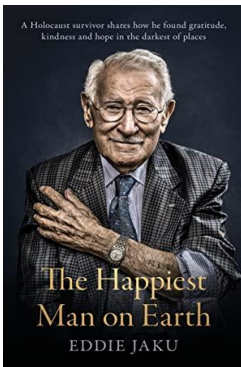
Discussion Questions

1. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
2. Which scene has stuck with you the most?
3. What surprised you most about the book?
4. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
5. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?
6. Did the book strike you as original?
7. Where does it take place?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Happiest Man on Earth

Eddie Jaku

About This Book

Life can be beautiful if you make it beautiful. It is up to you.

Eddie Jaku always considered himself a German first, a Jew second. He was proud of his country. But all of that changed in November 1938, when he was beaten, arrested, and taken to a concentration camp.

Over the next seven years, Eddie faced unimaginable horrors every day, first in Buchenwald, then in Auschwitz, then on a Nazi death march. He lost family, friends, his country.

Because he survived, Eddie made the vow to smile every day. He pays tribute to those who were lost by telling his story, sharing his wisdom, and living his best possible life. He now believes he is the 'happiest man on earth'.

Published as Eddie turns 100, this is a powerful, heartbreaking and ultimately hopeful memoir of how happiness can be found even in the darkest of times.

About The Author

Eddie Jaku is the author of the book 'Happiest Man on Earth'. This book is a heartbreaking, powerful, and ultimately hopeful memoir written by Eddie.

Eddie Jaku is 101 years old.

He was born in 1920 and celebrated his birthday on April 14th.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

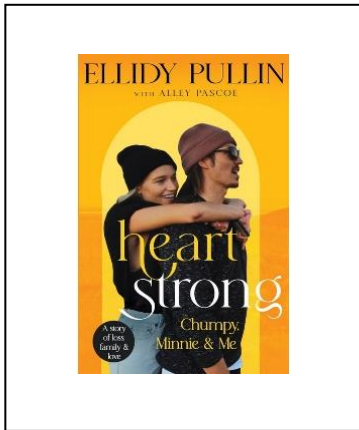
TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. What surprised you most about the book?
2. How did your opinion of the book change as you read it?
3. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
4. How does the book's title work in relation to the book's contents? If you could give the book a new title, what would it be?
5. Did this book remind you of any other books?
6. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
7. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
8. Who do you most want to read this book?
9. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?
10. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?



Book Club Reading Notes



Heartstrong

Ellidy Pullin

About This Book

It was a perfect Wednesday morning when Alex 'Chumpy' Pullin kissed his partner, Ellidy, goodbye to go spearfishing. Most days Ellidy would go to the beach too, but that day she didn't. Later, there was a knock at the door. A man had been found unconscious on the ocean floor. It was Chumpy. From that moment, Ellidy's world stopped. There was deep grief, disbelief and then the gradual realisation that this was real. Ellidy's partner of eight years, a World Champion snowboarder, a man of energy and music, was gone. And so was the life they had built together and the dream of the child they had been trying for. In the hours that followed a suggestion was made: did Ellidy want to harvest Chumpy's sperm and try for the baby they both wanted so deeply? There was a ticking clock and the need to discuss with family and friends. They had thirty-six hours before it would be too late . . .

About The Author

Ellidy Pullin is a popular podcaster and influencer. She loves the ocean, animals, the outdoors, sewing, cooking, camping, surfing, travelling, yoga, food and wine. Ellidy is determined to keep the memory of her partner Chumpy Pullin strong, to honour his spirit and for their daughter, Minnie.

Discussion Questions

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

 [Citylibraries Townsville](#)

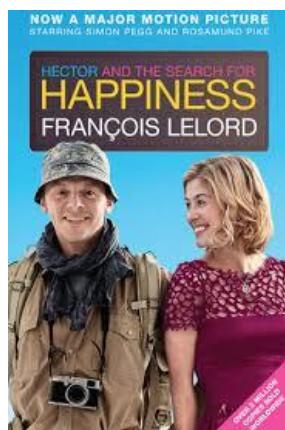
 [townsvillelib](#)

1. "Heartstrong" is a memoir that chronicles the deeply personal journey of Ellidy Pullin after the sudden loss of her partner, Chumpy. How did the author's storytelling style and perspective impact your reading experience?
2. The book touches on themes of grief, loss, and hope. How did Ellidy Pullin's portrayal of her experiences with grief resonate with you? How did she find hope in the darkest of times?
3. One of the central decisions in the book is whether Ellidy should harvest Chumpy's sperm to fulfill their dream of having a child. How did you react to this choice and the emotional weight it carried?
4. Discuss the support system that emerged around Ellidy, including her family, friends, lawyers, and doctors. How did these individuals impact her journey, and what role did they play in helping her keep a part of Chumpy alive?
5. The book is about love and the enduring connection between Chumpy, Ellidy, and their daughter, Minnie. How is love portrayed throughout the book, and how does it evolve as the story unfolds?
6. In "Heartstrong," Ellidy Pullin goes through the process of IVF to have a child. How did her IVF journey, with its ups and downs, add to the narrative of hope and resilience in the face of adversity?
7. The book not only chronicles Ellidy's journey but also highlights the significance of memory and legacy. How does Ellidy honor Chumpy's memory throughout the book, and what are some of the ways she keeps him alive in her life?
8. The title "Heartstrong" suggests inner strength and resilience. How does Ellidy demonstrate these qualities, and what can readers learn from her story about coping with challenging circumstances?
9. Discuss the role of family and the importance of open communication within the family unit. How did Ellidy's family support her throughout her journey, and how did they navigate the complex emotions involved?
10. "Heartstrong" explores the profound impact of sudden loss and the determination to move forward. How did Ellidy Pullin's story resonate with your own experiences with grief and the human capacity for resilience?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Hector and the Search for Happiness

François Lelord

About This Book

“Once upon a time there was a young psychiatrist called Hector who was not very satisfied with himself. . . .”

Hector is very good at treating patients in need of his help. But he can't do much for those who are simply dissatisfied with life, and that is beginning to depress him. When a patient tells him he looks in need of a vacation, Hector takes a trip around the world to learn what makes people happy—and sad. As he travels from Paris to China to Africa to the United States, he lists his observations about the people he meets. Is there a secret to happiness, and will Hector find it?

About The Author

François Lelord (born 22 June 1953 in Paris) is a French psychiatrist and author. He has written several psychological monographs together with Christoph André.

His first novel, *Le voyage d'Hector ou la recherche du bonheur* ("Hector's Voyage or the Search for Happiness"), was very successful in France as well as other countries such as Germany. It is a book on psychology written for ordinary readers; it tells the story of Hector, a psychiatrist, who travels around the world in search of what it is that makes people happy. The book is written in a simple, humorous style, and gives psychological advice and thought-provoking impulses without even touching dry theory. Lelord continues to publish novels dealing with similar topics which are written in a similar manner.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

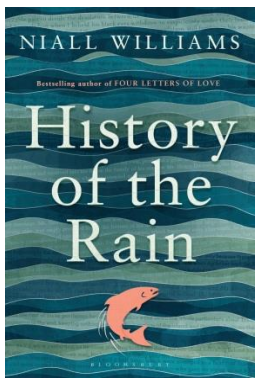
Discussion Questions

1. What were the themes of the book? Do you feel they were adequately explored? Were they brought to life in a cliché or in a unique manner?
2. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
3. What surprised you the most about the book?
4. Did any of the characters remind you of yourself or someone you know? How?
5. What is motivating the actions of the characters in the story? What do the sub-characters want from the main character and what does the main character want with them?
6. How did the "roles" of the various characters influence their interactions? I.e. For a woman: Mother, daughter, sister, wife, lover, professional, etc.
7. Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters? What would you have done differently?
8. What past influences are shaping the actions of the characters in the story?
9. Did you think the ending was appropriate? How would you have liked to have seen the ending go?
10. How have the characters changed by the end of the book?
11. Have any of YOUR views or thoughts changed after reading this book?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



History of the Rain

Niall Williams

About This Book

We are our stories. We tell them to stay alive or keep alive those who only live now in the telling. In Faha, County Clare, everyone is a long story... Bedbound in her attic room beneath the falling rain, in the margin between this world and the next, Plain Ruth Swain is in search of her father. To find him, enfolded in the mystery of ancestors, Ruthie must first trace the jutting jaw lines, narrow faces and gleamy skin of the Swains from the restless Reverend Swain, her great-grandfather, to grandfather Abraham, to her father, Virgil - via pole-vaulting, leaping salmon, poetry and the three thousand, nine hundred and fifty eight books piled high beneath the two skylights in her room, beneath the rain. The stories - of her golden twin brother Aeney, their closeness even as he slips away; of their dogged pursuit of the Swains' Impossible Standard and forever falling just short; of the wild, rain-sodden history of fourteen acres of the worst farming land in Ireland - pour forth in Ruthie's still, small, strong, hopeful voice. A celebration of books, love and the healing power of the imagination, this is an exquisite, funny, moving novel in which every sentence sings.

About The Author

Niall Williams studied English and French Literature at University College Dublin and graduated with a MA in Modern American Literature. He moved to New York in 1980 where he married Christine Breen. His first job in New York was opening boxes of books in Fox and Sutherland's Bookshop in Mount Kisco. He later worked as a copywriter for Avon Books in New York City before leaving America with Chris in 1985 to attempt to make a life as a writer in Ireland. They moved on April 1st to the cottage in west Clare that Chris's grandfather had left eighty years before to find his life in America.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

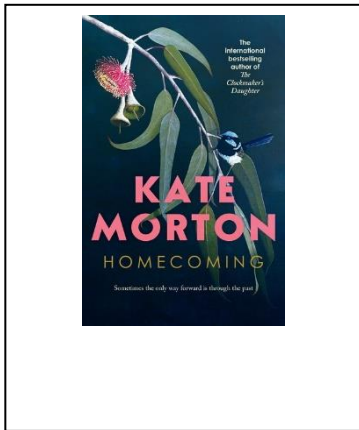
TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. Ruth switches back and forth between the generations in her narrative and has many diversions. Why do you think Niall Williams chose to tell the story in this way?
2. Does this make a difference to the way you read and understand the novel?
3. In a recent interview Niall Williams said 'At one level, this novel is about stories and storytelling. And in that tradition, the voice of the storyteller is crucial. So I hope readers will settle in to listen to Ruth Swain. She has a unique voice and I, at least, found that voice compelling'. What is your response to Ruth's storytelling voice?
4. The novel's 'big secret' is obvious early on, and, therefore, is the reveal 'more of a relief than a surprise'?
5. In what ways does *History of the Rain* capture the gossiping, provincial attitude of a rural Irish community but also its generosity, kindness and acceptance of the unusual?
6. The Swain family believes in the 'impossible standard philosophy' — essentially the idea that you can always do better. Does this make it impossible for them to be happy?



Book Club Reading Notes



Homecoming

Kate Morton

About This Book

At the end of a scorching hot day, a local man makes a terrible discovery. Police are called, and the small town of Tambilla becomes embroiled in one of the most baffling murder investigations in the history of South Australia. Many years later and thousands of miles away, Jess is a journalist in search of a story. A phone call summons her back to Sydney, where her beloved grandmother, Nora, who raised Jess when her mother could not, has suffered a fall and is seriously ill in hospital. At Nora's house, Jess discovers a true-crime book chronicling a long-buried police case: the Turner Family Tragedy of 1959. It is only when Jess skims through its pages that she finds a shocking connection between her own family and this notorious event - a murder mystery that has never been satisfactorily resolved.

About The Author

KATE MORTON is an award-winning, New York Times and Sunday Times bestselling author. Her seven novels - *The House at Riverton*, *The Forgotten Garden*, *The Distant Hours*, *The Secret Keeper*, *The Lake House*, *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, and *Homecoming* - are published in over 45 countries, in 38 languages, and have all been number one bestsellers around the world.

Kate Morton was born in South Australia, grew up in the mountains of south-east Queensland, and now lives with her family in London and Australia. She has degrees in dramatic art and English literature, and harboured dreams of joining the Royal Shakespeare Company until she realised that it was words she loved more than performing. Kate still feels a pang of longing each time she goes to the theatre and the house lights dim.

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

 [Citylibraries Townsville](https://www.facebook.com/CitylibrariesTownsville)

 [townsvillelib](https://www.instagram.com/townsvillelib)

Discussion Questions

1. The novel begins on Christmas Eve in 1959, setting the stage for a significant family tragedy. How does this initial scene impact the rest of the story, and what tone does it establish for the book?
2. The book features two timelines, one set in the past and one in the present. How do these timelines intersect, and what purpose does each timeline serve in the storytelling?
3. Nora is a central character in the story, and much of the novel revolves around her past and her actions in the present. How does the author portray Nora's character, and what are your impressions of her?
4. The novel incorporates a book within a book, adding a layer of metafiction to the story. What are your thoughts on this narrative technique, and how does it enhance your understanding of the family's history?
5. The concept of family secrets and their impact on future generations is a recurring theme in the book. How do the characters in the novel grapple with these secrets, and what effects do they have on their lives?
6. Jess, as the protagonist, is on a quest to uncover her family's past. How does her journey evolve throughout the book, and what motivates her to piece together the mystery surrounding her grandmother?
7. The book highlights the process of storytelling and the interpretation of history. How does the author explore the ways in which stories are told and understood, especially when they span multiple generations?
8. Suspicion and mistrust are prominent themes in the novel, as various characters come under scrutiny for their actions. Did you find yourself suspecting certain characters at different points in the story, and how did these suspicions evolve?
9. The novel is set in both London and Australia. How does the author effectively convey the sense of place and the importance of locations in the narrative?
10. The novel delves into the impact of tragedy on a family over time. How does the concept of healing, forgiveness, and redemption play a role in the book's resolution and conclusion?

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

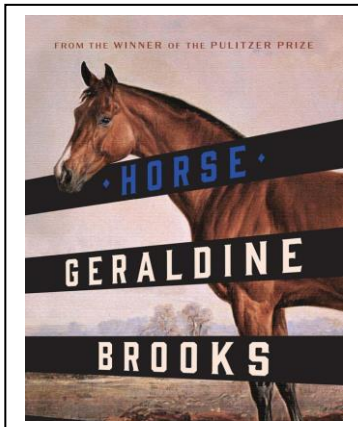
 Citylibraries Townsville

 [townsvillelib](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv8p3K1p3K1p3K1p3K1p3K1)



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Horse

Geraldine Brooks

About This Book

A discarded painting in a roadside clean-up, forgotten bones in a research archive, and Lexington, the greatest racehorse in US history. From these strands of fact, Geraldine Brooks weaves a sweeping story of spirit, obsession, and injustice across American history.

Kentucky, 1850. An enslaved groom named Jarret and a bay foal forge a bond of understanding that will carry the horse to record-setting victories across the South, even as the nation reels towards war. An itinerant young artist who makes his name from paintings of the horse takes up arms for the Union and reconnects with the stallion and his groom on a perilous night far from the glamour of any racetrack. Based on the remarkable true story of the record-breaking thoroughbred Lexington, *Horse* is a novel of art and science, love and obsession, and our unfinished reckoning with racism.

About The Author

Australian-born Geraldine Brooks is an author and journalist who grew up in Sydney's western suburbs. She worked for the Sydney Morning Herald and in 1982 she won the Greg Shackleton scholarship to the journalism master's program at Columbia University. In 2006 she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for her novel *March*. Her novels *Caleb's Crossing*, *People of the Book* and *The Secret Chord* were New York Times bestsellers, and *Year of Wonders* is an international bestseller, translated into more than 25 languages.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

Discussion Questions

1. On page 28 (Theo, Georgetown, Washington, DC, 2019), Theo reflects that depictions of horses are among the oldest art humans created. The book's epigraphs reflect on the significance of Lexington --- in his day, an even bigger celebrity than Seabiscuit or Secretariat. Discuss the enduring human fascination with horses. Do they move you more than other animals? If so, why?
2. Theo and Jess are both obsessed with their rarefied fields of expertise. Does the author manage to convey why these unusual careers can be so compelling? If so, how?
3. Jarret's connection with horses is presented as stronger than his bonds with people. How does his love for and dedication to Lexington help or hamper his coming of age and his transformation over the course of the novel?
4. Horseracing in the mid-19th century was very different to its modern iteration. What surprised you? Do you think horseracing today takes adequate care for the well-being of equines?
5. On p. 71 (Thomas J. Scott, *The Meadows*, Lexington, Kentucky, 1852), Scott writes, "[We] who think we are above enslaving our fellow man are corrupted. Only show us absolute agency over the apt and the willing, and suddenly we find the planters' obduracy that much less odious. I must guard against the rank seductions of this place." How does the author draw out the similarities and differences between Northern and Southern attitudes in this era through Thomas J. Scott, a practiced observer who moves between the regions?
6. Several historical figures appear in the novel, among them the emancipationist newspaper publisher Cassius Clay and his daughter, the suffragist Mary Barr Clay. What are Cassius Clay's arguments for emancipation to the Warfield family? Do you see the roots of what would become Mary Barr Clay's passion for the women's suffrage movement in the way she is portrayed in her youth? What are their respective strengths and limitations? How do novels make historical figures come alive for us beyond what we might find in a work of nonfiction?
7. Martha Jackson was a real American gallery owner and art collector. Discuss her portrayal in *HORSE* and what her relationship to the painting of Lexington conveys about her character. What does her storyline contribute to the novel's themes? What did her chapters reveal to you about America in that era, and did you notice any similarities between the art world of the mid-20th century and the horse racing economy of a century prior?

8. Referring to the Civil War on p. 87 (Jess, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC, 2019), Jess says, “Not my war [...] Unless you call Australia the very Deep South.” Theo is also not American. Nevertheless, they’re both forced to reckon with the legacy of slavery --- particularly Theo, who encounters racism in his daily life. How does this affect their relationship? What does the novel reveal about the way history shapes our present moment?
9. Discuss Theo and Jess’ relationship. What do you think attracts them to one another despite their differences? What do they learn from each other?
10. Examine Jess’ conversation with Daniel in the aftermath of what happens to Theo at the end of the novel. What did you make of Daniel’s assessment of the situation? Do you share his point of view?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



House of Kwa

Mimi Kwa

About This Book

Mimi Kwa ignored the letter for days. When she finally opened it, the news was so shocking her hair turned grey. Why would a father sue his own daughter?

The collision was over the estate of Mimi's beloved Aunt Theresa, but its seed had been sown long ago. To understand how it had come to this, Mimi unspools her rich family history in House of Kwa.

One of a wealthy silk merchant's 32 children, Mimi's father, Francis, was just a little boy when the Kwa family became caught up in the brutal and devastating Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during World War II. Years later, he was sent to study in Australia by his now independent and successful older sister Theresa. There he met and married Mimi's mother, a nineteen-year-old with an undiagnosed, chronic mental illness. Soon after, 'tiger' Mimi arrived, and her struggle with the past - and the dragon - began ...

Riveting, colourful and often darkly humorous, House of Kwa is an epic family drama spanning four generations, and an unforgettable story about how one woman finds the courage to stand up for her freedom and independence, squaring off against the ghosts of the past and finally putting them to rest. Throughout, her inspiration is Francis's late older sister, the jet-setting, free-spirited Aunt Theresa, whose extraordinary life is a beacon of hope in the darkness

About The Author

Mimi Kwa is an author with Harper Collins, a freelance writer, public speaking and positive mindset coach, tv host and presenter, actor, reporter and news anchor. She's been a regular face on the ABC and Channel 9 for twenty years and has also written for Pacific Magazine mastheads such as New Idea. Mimi has four children and loves to paint. She hopes her storytelling and life's work will contribute to areas of mental health, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. Would you want to read another book by this author?
2. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
3. What surprised you most about the book?
4. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
5. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
6. How does the book's title work in relation to the book's contents? If you could give the book a new title, what would it be?
7. Is this book overrated or underrated?
8. Did this book remind you of any other books?
9. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
10. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
11. Who do you most want to read this book?
12. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Huntress

Kate Quinn

About This Book

From the author of the New York Times and USA Today bestselling novel, *The Alice Network*, comes another fascinating historical novel about a battle-haunted English journalist and a Russian female bomber pilot who join forces to track the Huntress, a Nazi war criminal gone to ground in America.

About The Author

Kate Quinn is the New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of historical fiction. A native of southern California, she attended Boston University where she earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Classical Voice. She has written four novels in the *Empress of Rome* Saga, and two books in the Italian Renaissance, before turning to the 20th century with "*The Alice Network*" and "*The Huntress*." All have been translated into multiple languages. Kate and her husband now live in San Diego with two rescue dogs named Caesar and Calpurnia, and her interests include opera, action movies, cooking, and the Boston Red Sox.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL



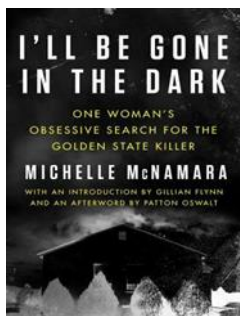
Discussion Questions

1. All the characters begin the book standing on different lake shores --- Nina at Lake Baikal, Anneliese at Altaussee, Jordan at Selkie Lake, and Ian at the lake in Cologne. Nina and the Huntress clash for the first time at Lake Rusalka in Poland, and everyone comes together ultimately at the lake in Massachusetts. Discuss how the idea of the lake, and the rusalka lake spirit, weaves through THE HUNTRESS as a theme.
2. Ian states that the life of a Nazi hunter is about patience, boredom and fact-checking, not high-speed glamour and action. Do you agree with him? What preconceptions did you have about Nazi hunters?
3. Jordan's drive to become a photographer clashes with the expectations of her father --- and almost everyone else she knows --- that she will marry her high school boyfriend, work in the family business, and relegate picture-snapping to a hobby. How have expectations of career versus marriage changed for women since 1950?
4. Nina calls herself a savage because of her early life in the wilds around the lake with her murderous, unpredictable father. How did her upbringing equip her to succeed, first as a bomber pilot and then as a fugitive on the run? Does her outsider status make her see Soviet oppression more clearly than Yelena, who accepts it as the way things should be?
5. When Jordan first brings up suspicions about her stepmother at Thanksgiving, her theories are quashed by Anneliese's plausible explanations. Did you believe Anneliese's story at Thanksgiving, or Jordan's instinct? When did you realize that Jordan's stepmother and die Jägerin were one and the same?
6. "The ends justify the means." Ian disagrees strongly, maintaining he will not use violence to pursue war criminals. Nina, on the other hand, has no problem employing violent methods to reach a target, and Tony stands somewhere between them on the ideological scale. How do their beliefs change as they work together? Who do you think is right?
7. Ian and Nina talk about lakes and parachutes, referencing the bad dreams and postwar baggage that inevitably come to those who have gone to war. How do Ian and Tony deal with their post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor guilt, as opposed to Nina and the Night Witches?
8. By the end of THE HUNTRESS, Jordan has found success as a photographer, Tony is a human rights attorney, and Ian and Nina are still hunting war criminals. Where do you see the team in 10 years? Do you think Ian and Nina will remain married, or will Nina find a way back to Yelena, her first love? Do you think Jordan and Tony will stay together, or drift apart as friends? What about Ruth?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



I'll Be Gone in the Dark

Michelle McNamara

About This Book

At the time of the crimes, the Golden State Killer was between the ages of eighteen and thirty, Caucasian, and athletic—capable of vaulting tall fences. He always wore a mask. After choosing a victim—he favoured suburban couples—he often entered their home when no one was there, studying family pictures, mastering the layout. He attacked while they slept, using a flashlight to awaken and blind them. Though they could not recognize him, his victims recalled his voice: a guttural whisper through clenched teeth, abrupt and threatening.

The masterpiece McNamara was writing at the time of her sudden death—offers an atmospheric snapshot of a moment in American history and a chilling account of a criminal mastermind and the wreckage he left behind. It is also a portrait of a woman's obsession and her unflinching pursuit of the truth. Framed by an introduction by Gillian Flynn and an afterword by her husband, Patton Oswalt, the book was completed by Michelle's lead researcher and a close colleague. Utterly original and compelling, it is destined to become a true crime classic—and may at last unmask the Golden State Killer.

About The Author

Michelle McNamara was a screenwriter, journalist, and true crime writer. She was the founder of the blog "True Crime Diary," which covers lesser-known crimes and cold cases. In 2005, she married comedian Patton Oswalt. They had one daughter together, born in 2009.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

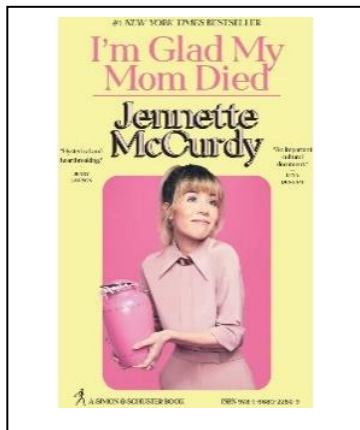
TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. Early in the book, Michelle McNamara writes, "I need to see his face. He loses his power when we know his face." What is the Golden State Killer's power, and how would he lose this if he was identified?
2. Michelle writes about an incident in her own neighbourhood in Los Angeles, when her neighbour's house was robbed. "We make well-intentioned promises of protection we can't always keep. I'll look out for you." Do you think we, as a society, have lost a sense of neighbourliness?
3. While *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* is a true crime story—a chronicle of the Golden State Killer—it is also a memoir. Why do you think she included the story of her childhood and relationship with her mother in this story?
4. In the book Michelle confesses, "Writing this now, I'm struck by two incompatible truths that pain me. No one would have taken more joy from this book than my mother. And I probably wouldn't have felt the freedom to write it until she was gone." Why couldn't she write this book if her mother had still been alive?
5. Why is it difficult for many people to reconcile parental expectations and disappointments with their own pursuits?
6. In following Michelle's search to unmask the GSK, what did you learn about her and the kind of person she is? How does getting to know her shape the story and your understanding of the case as it unfolds? Meeting Michelle in these pages, does she fit with your "profile" of a true crime obsessive? How would you characterize Michelle if you were introducing her to a friend?
7. Novelist Gillian Flynn wrote the introduction to the book. How are crime novelists and true crime writers alike, and how do they differ?
8. Do you read crime novels? If so, what draws you to them? How does the experience of reading a crime novel compare to reading a true crime account? What emotions do each elicit?
9. What does Michelle tell us about the way crimes are investigated? What did you learn about the professionals who investigate them? What, if anything, might have helped them in their search for the GSK? How has technology improved their ability to share information?



Book Club Reading Notes



I'm Glad My Mom Died

Jennette McCurdy

About This Book

Jennette McCurdy was six years old when she had her first acting audition. Her mother's dream was for her only daughter to become a star, and Jennette would do anything to make her mother happy. She endured extensive at-home makeovers while Mom chided, "Your eyelashes are invisible, okay? You think Dakota Fanning doesn't tint hers?" She was even showered by Mom until age sixteen while sharing her diaries, email, and all her income. Cast in a new Nickelodeon series called iCarly, she is thrust into fame. Jennette is riddled with anxiety, shame, and self-loathing. These issues only get worse when, soon after taking the lead in the iCarly spinoff Sam & Cat alongside Ariana Grande, her mother dies of cancer. Finally, after discovering therapy and quitting acting, Jennette embarks on recovery and decides for the first time in her life what she really wants.

About The Author

Jennette McCurdy got her start in child acting, which by her late teen years had brought her success (she starred in Nickelodeon's hit show iCarly and her own spin-off, Sam & Cat). She went on to star in the Netflix series Between, and had a short-lived country music career with Capitol Records Nashville. Despite her outside success, McCurdy felt ashamed of 90% of her resume and ultimately unfulfilled, so she turned to alcohol, but since that didn't work, she quit acting and began pursuing writing/directing in 2017. She has written/directed a pilot and four short films. Her work has been featured in/on The Hollywood Reporter, Short of the Week, Florida Film Festival, Salute Your Shorts, and many more. She has written articles for Huffington Post and the Wall Street Journal. Her one-woman show "I'm Glad My Mom Died" had a sold-out run at Lyric Hyperion Theatre. She hosts a podcast called "Empty Inside", where she speaks with guests about uncomfortable topics.

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

 [Citylibraries Townsville](#)

 [townsvillelib](#)

Discussion Questions

1. "I'm Glad My Mom Died" is a deeply personal and candid memoir that delves into Jennette McCurdy's experiences as a former child actor. How did the author's honest storytelling style impact your perception of her journey?
2. The book sheds light on the pressures and expectations placed on Jennette McCurdy from a young age by her mother. How did you react to the portrayal of their complex relationship, and what are the factors that contributed to it?
3. Eating disorders, addiction, and anxiety are some of the challenges that Jennette McCurdy faced during her acting career. How did these struggles affect her life, and what insights did you gain into the entertainment industry's impact on young actors?
4. Jennette's mother played a pivotal role in her life, influencing her decisions and choices. How did her mother's death impact Jennette's path to self-discovery and independence?
5. Discuss the role of therapy in Jennette's journey toward recovery. How did seeking professional help contribute to her healing and the decisions she made in her life?
6. The book touches on themes of identity, self-worth, and finding one's true desires. How does Jennette's story reflect the process of self-discovery and the pursuit of personal happiness?
7. Humor plays a significant role in the book, providing moments of levity in the midst of difficult experiences. How does humor help Jennette cope with adversity and connect with readers?
8. In the book, Jennette shares her journey from child star to stepping away from acting to prioritize her well-being. How did you feel about her decision to leave the entertainment industry behind and the way it impacted her life?
9. Discuss the concept of resilience and how Jennette McCurdy's story serves as an inspiring example of overcoming adversity and rebuilding her life. What moments in the book demonstrate her resilience?
10. "I'm Glad My Mom Died" is a memoir that explores themes of love, grief, and transformation. How did Jennette's journey to self-acceptance and independence resonate with you, and what lessons can readers draw from her story?

 townsville.qld.gov.au/libraries

 library@townsville.qld.gov.au

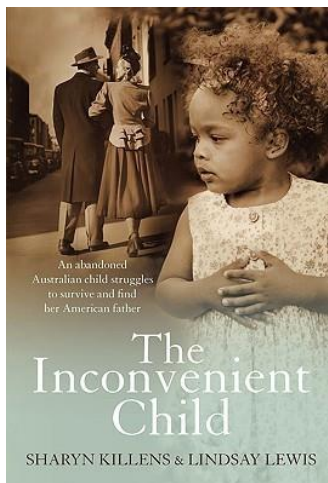
 Citylibraries Townsville

 [townsvillelib](https://www.youtube.com/townsvillelib)



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Inconvenient Child

Sharyn Killens and Lindsay Lewis

About This Book

An abandoned Australian child struggles to survive and find her American father. An unacceptable liaison, a secret birth, a mother's silence, and her black child's journey to discover the truth... It is 1948, Sydney, Australia. Pretty, blonde Grace discovers she is pregnant to a black merchant marine who has sailed back to America. The White Australia Policy is in place and society's judgment matters; so what will Grace do with this baby? This is the true story of the inconvenient child. Rescued from neglectful foster care by an American champion boxer, the baby is taken to live in a party house in Sydney's red light district of Kings Cross. Her absent, elegant mother then abandons Sharyn in a convent-orphanage, at age five. By fifteen, discrimination within her family, resentment and clashes over her father's undisclosed identity see the troubled teenager running

away to the streets of Kings Cross where she's arrested and sentenced to notorious juvenile detention centers. Sharyn's solace is her love of music but can she realize her dream to become a singer if, by twenty-four, she is trapped in the Kings Cross lifestyle? Determined to find her father, Sharyn sets out in search of her roots, a quest taking her across the world and eventually to America's Deep South. But will she find the loving family and belonging she has yearned for all her life?

About The Author

Sharyn Killens' love of music and her driving ambition to become a singer entertainer enabled her to fulfill her dream of singing on stages and luxury cruise ships around the world, under the name of Sharyn Crystal. Sharyn has also been nominated for a prestigious Australian Entertainment MO Award for her performance. She has also worked as a publicist assistant and entertainment booking agent and manager. More recently, she has been a talent quest judge, taught stage presentation and has produced children's theatre shows.

Lindsay Lewis began her business career in a major record company before running her own businesses. In 1992, after many years working in key Sydney advertising agencies, she moved into publicity before beginning her own successful textile design and manufacturing company with her husband where she was Designer and Creative Director. She has an Internet marketing business and has now co-written and published *The Inconvenient Child*. Lindsay also spent many years as a professional singer and entertainer.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL



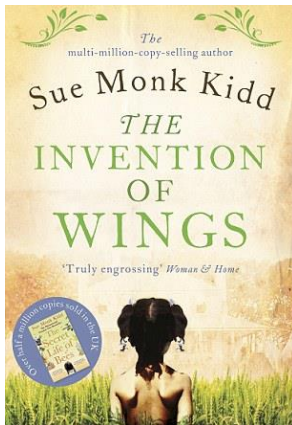
Discussion Questions

1. When Grace confides in her mother about her pregnancy, her mother says, 'Abort it. Adopt it. Drown it. Just get rid of it! That evil child is never coming into my home ... A good and decent man will come along one day and want to marry you. But that will never happen if you keep this devil child ... And besides, what will the neighbors think?' What does this tell you about Adele Samuels? Is she right to say those things to her daughter? Consider the impact of the attitude of the times in which they lived; would a mother like Adele today give different advice? Why do you think Adele did not want this child in her home?
 2. What other choices could Grace have made, considering she had no financial support and no husband? How would the racist attitudes of the time, have affected her options?
 3. Why did Grace keep returning to the child if only sporadically? Why did Sharyn love this mother who abandoned her? Discuss the impact of Grace's choices on Sharyn's life and on her relationship with Grace.
 4. Were Ellie and Dorrie parenting Sharyn well in their 'party house?' How does it compare with the care she received at St Martha's orphanage?
 5. Why were nuns so strict? Is a pious religion good for children? Why do you think Sister Lucifer treated Sharyn so?
 6. Sharyn and her stepfather Lars had a complex relationship. Was he a good role model for the troubled teenager? Why do you suppose he kept her existence a secret from his family? How do you think Lars' and Grace's attitude to Sharyn, affected her relationship with her young brother? On page 255, during Sharyn's conversation with Lars, why do you suppose he would not look at her after she tells him of her treatment in the institutions? The Inconvenient Child
- Discussion Notes Page 5
7. Was the Magistrate right to commit Sharyn to yet another institution after her breach of probation? What else could the authorities have done? Do you consider she was uncontrollable and in moral danger? Discuss the Child Welfare system of the day and how today's system differs? Did the consequences of this decision fit the behavior? (Consider, for example, Sharyn's treatment in Parramatta Girls' Home and Hay Institution for Girls.)
 8. With regard to Hay Institution for Girls, should the Hay townspeople have responded differently when they heard the girls screaming? What would you have done under the same circumstances?
 9. Was Grace pleased to see Sharyn return home, on release from Parramatta? Why do you think Grace would not discuss Parramatta and Hay with her daughter? Discuss why Grace consistently told Sharyn to forget the past and think only of the future.
 10. Do you consider Sharyn was a good mother, even when she took drugs and worked as a stripper in Kings Cross? What would the children have thought of their life surrounded by musicians, music and drugs?
 11. Would Sharyn have become a singer, even without the encouragement from her work colleague? Would you have accepted the part in Let My People Come?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Invention of Wings

Sue Monk Kidd

About This Book

'Master Grimké named me Hetty, but mauma looked on me the day I came into the world, how I was born too soon, and she called me Handful.' Handful's always been trouble. A slave in the Grimké household like her beloved mother Charlotte, Handful knows the rules, in all their brutality, but no one can stop her pushing them to the limit. When, at ten years old, she's presented to her owner's most difficult daughter, Sarah, as a birthday present, the sparks begin to fly...

About The Author

Sue Monk Kidd was raised in the small town of Sylvester, Georgia. She graduated from Texas Christian University in 1970 and later took creative writing courses at Emory University and Anderson College, as well as studying at Sewanee, Bread Loaf, and other writers' conferences. In her forties, Kidd turned her attention to writing fiction, winning the South Carolina Fellowship in Literature and the 1996 Poets & Writers Exchange Program in Fiction.

When her first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, was published by Viking in 2002, it became a genuine literary phenomenon, spending more than 2½ years on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It has been translated into 36 languages and sold more than 6 million copies in the U.S. and 8 million copies worldwide. *Bees* was named the Book Sense Paperback Book of the Year in 2004, long-listed for the 2002 Orange Prize in England, and won numerous awards.

The Mermaid Chair spent 24 weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover bestseller list, reaching the #1 position, and spent 22 weeks on the *New York Times* trade paperback list. She is also the author of several acclaimed memoirs, including the *New York Times* bestseller *Traveling with Pomegranates*, written with her daughter, Ann Kidd Taylor. Kidd lives in Florida with her husband.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

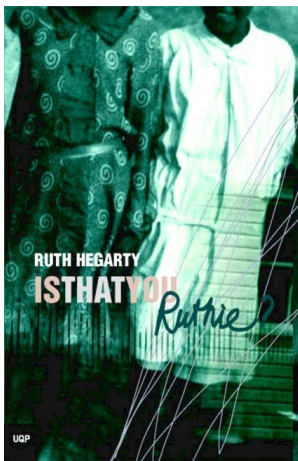
Discussion Questions

1. The title *The Invention of Wings* was one of the first inspirations that came to Sue Monk Kidd as she began the novel. Why is the title an apt one for Kidd's novel? What are some of the ways that the author uses the imagery and symbolism of birds, wings, and flight?
2. What were the qualities in Handful that you most admired? As you read the novel, could you imagine yourself in her situation? How did Handful continue her relentless pursuit of self and freedom in the face of such a brutal system?
3. After laying aside her aspirations to become a lawyer, Sarah remarks that the Graveyard of Failed Hopes is "an all-female establishment." What makes her say so? What was your experience of reading Kidd's portrayal of women's lives in the nineteenth century?
4. In what ways does Sarah struggle against the dictates of her family, society, and religion? Can you relate to her need to break away from the life she had in order to create a new and unknown life? What sort of risk and courage does this call for?
5. The story of *The Invention of Wings* includes a number of physical objects that have a special significance for the characters: Sarah's fleur-de-lis button, Charlotte's story quilt, the rabbit-head cane that Handful receives from Goodis, and the spirit tree. Choose one or more of these objects and discuss their significance in the novel.
6. Were you aware of the role that Sarah and Angelina Grimke played in abolition and women's rights? Have women's achievements in history been lost or overlooked? What do you think it takes to be a reformer today?
7. How would you describe Sarah and Angelina's unusual bond? Do you think either one of them could have accomplished what they did on their own? Have you known women who experienced this sort of relationship as sisters?
8. Some of the staunchest enemies of slavery believed the time had not yet come for women's rights and pressured Sarah and Angelina to desist from the cause, fearing it would split the cause of abolition. How do you think the sisters should have responded to their demand? At the end of the novel, Sarah asks, "Was it ever right to sacrifice one's truth for expedience?"
9. What are some of the examples of Handful's wit and sense of irony, and how do they help her cope with the burdens of slavery?
10. Contrast Handful's relationship with her mother with the relationship between Sarah and the elder Mary Grimke. How are the two younger women formed-and malformed-by their mothers?
11. Kidd portrays an array of male characters in the novel: Sarah's father; Sarah's brother, Thomas; Theodore Weld; Denmark Vesey; Goodis Grimke, Israel Morris, Burke Williams. Some of them are men of their time, some are ahead of their time. Which of these male characters did you find most compelling? What positive and negative roles did they play in Sarah and Handful's evolvment?
12. How has your understanding of slavery been changed by reading *The Invention of Wings*? What did you learn about it that you didn't know before?
13. Sarah believed she could not have a vocation and marriage, both. Do you think she made the right decision in turning down Israel's proposal? How does her situation compare with Angelina's marriage to Theodore? In what ways are women today still asking the question of whether they can have it all?
14. How does the spirit tree function in Handful's life? What do you think of the rituals and meanings surrounding it?
15. Had you heard of the Denmark Vesey slave plot before reading this novel? Were you aware of the extent that slaves resisted? Why do you think the myth of the happy, compliant slave endured? What were some of the more inventive or cunning ways that Charlotte, Handful, and other characters rebelled and subverted the system?
16. *The Invention of Wings* takes the reader back to the roots of racism in America. How has slavery left its mark on American life? To what extent has the wound been healed? Do you think slavery has been a taboo topic in American life?
17. Are there ways in which Kidd's novel can help us see our own lives differently? How is this story relevant for us today?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Is That You Ruthie

Ruth Hegarty

About This Book

Is that you? Matron's voice would ring out across the dormitory. In that pause sixty little girls would stop in their tracks, waiting to hear who was in trouble. All too often the name called out would be that of the high spirited dormitory girl Ruthie. In the Depression years Queensland's notorious Cherbourg Aboriginal Mission become home to four-year-old Ruth until her late teens when she was sent out to serve as a domestic on a station homestead.

Ruthie is the central character in this lively and candid memoir of institutional life. Her milestones and memories reflect the experiences of many dormitory girls. The strong and lasting bonds that developed between them helped to compensate for family love and support denied them by the disruptive removal policy of the day.

An inspiring lifestory, this remarkable memoir won the prestigious David Unaipon Award in 1998. In her recently released sequel Bittersweet Journey Ruth recounts, with characteristic humour and honesty, a dormitory girl's life after the Mission.

About The Author

Ruth Hegarty won the 1998 David Unaipon Award for unpublished Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers with her entry *Is That You, Ruthie?* The sequel, *Bittersweet Journey* was released by UQP in November 2003. Ruth Hegarty has raised a family of eight children and lives in Brisbane, and for more than thirty years has been involved on a volunteer basis in projects for the elderly and youth. A founding member of Koobara Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Family Resource Centre, she is president of the Brisbane respite centre Nalingu, and a trainer with the Home and Community Care Resource Unit. In 1998 she was awarded the Premier's Award for Queensland Seniors, for outstanding service to the community.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

Discussion Questions

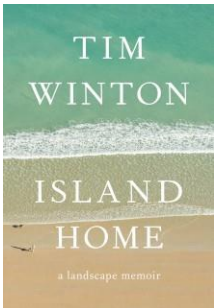


1. Did you admire or detest this person? Why?
2. What was the motivation for the writing of this book?
3. What did you find to be the most interesting events in this book? What surprised you?
4. Was there a lesson could be taken away from this person's life? What was it and why is it important?
5. Did preconceived opinions of this person change after reading their story? If so, did it change for the better or the worse?
6. What was this person's major accomplishment? If you were designing symbolic representations for this person, what would you include?
7. What kind of impact did this person have on the lives of others?
8. Does the topic covered in this book remind you of anything else that is happening in the world right now? How are they similar?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Island Home

Tim Winton

About This Book

'I grew up on the world's largest island.' This apparently simple fact is the starting point for Tim Winton's beautiful, evocative and sometimes provocative memoir of how this unique landscape has shaped him and his writing. For over thirty years, Winton has written novels in which the natural world is as much a living presence as any character. What is true of his work is also true of his life: from boyhood, his relationship with the world around him – rockpools, seacaves, scrub and swamp – was as vital as any other connection. Camping in hidden inlets of the south-east, walking in the high rocky desert fringe, diving at Ningaloo Reef, bobbing in the sea between sets, Winton has felt the place seep into him, with its rhythms, its dangers, its strange sustenance, and learned to see landscape as a living process. *Island Home* is the story of how that relationship with the Australian landscape came to be, and how it has determined his ideas, his writing and his life. It is also a passionate exhortation for all of us to feel the ground beneath our feet. Much more powerfully than a political idea, or an economy, Australia is a physical entity. Where we are defines who we are, in ways we too often forget to our detriment, and the country's.

About The Author

Tim Winton was born in Perth, Western Australia, but moved at a young age to the small country town of Albany. While a student at Curtin University of Technology, Winton wrote his first novel, *An Open Swimmer*. It went on to win The Australian/Vogel Literary Award in 1981, and launched his writing career. In fact, he wrote "the best part of three books while at university". His second book, *Shallows*, won the Miles Franklin Award in 1984. It wasn't until *Cloudstreet* was published in 1991, however, that his career and economic future were cemented. In 1995 Winton's novel, *The Riders*, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, as was his 2002 book, *Dirt Music*. Both are currently being adapted for film. He has won many other prizes, including the Miles Franklin Award three times: for *Shallows* (1984), *Cloudstreet* (1992) and *Dirt Music* (2002). *Cloudstreet* is arguably his best-known work, regularly appearing in lists of Australia's best-loved novels. His latest novel, released in 2013, is called *Eyrie*. He is now one of Australia's most esteemed novelists, writing for both adults and children. All his books are still in print and have been published in eighteen different languages. His work has also been successfully adapted for stage, screen and radio. On the publication of his novel, *Dirt Music*, he collaborated with broadcaster, Lucky Oceans, to produce a compilation CD, *Dirt Music – Music for a Novel*. He has lived in Italy, France, Ireland and Greece but currently lives in Western Australia with his wife and three children.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

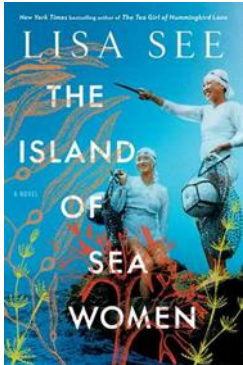
Discussion Questions

1. How does a person become a hero or a role model for others?
2. What was this person's major accomplishment? If you were designing symbolic representations for this person, what would you include?
3. How did this person demonstrate perseverance?
4. How did this person become famous?
5. What character traits do you admire most in this person?
6. What did you learn from this person's life?
7. Are there ways you can connect your experiences with this person's experiences?
8. What kind of impact did this person have on the lives of others?
9. Can you link this person's life to specific examples from fiction?
10. Can you relate qualities in this person or aspects of this person's experience to archetypes in literature?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



The Island of Sea Women

Lisa See

About This Book

Set on the Korean island of Jeju, *The Island of Sea Women* follows Mi-ja and Young-sook, two girls from very different backgrounds, as they begin working in the sea with their village's all-female diving collective. Over many decades—through the Japanese colonialism of the 1930s and 1940s, World War II, the Korean War, and the era of cell phones and wet suits for the women divers—Mi-ja and Young-sook develop the closest of bonds.

This beautiful, thoughtful novel illuminates a unique and unforgettable culture, one where the women are in charge, engaging in dangerous physical work, and the men take care of the children. A classic Lisa See story—one of women's friendships and the larger forces that shape them—*The Island of Sea Women* introduces readers to the fierce female divers of Jeju Island and the dramatic history that shaped their lives.

About The Author

Lisa See is a Chinese American author. Her books include *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2005), *Dragon Bones*, and *On Gold Mountain*. She was named the 2001 National Woman of the Year, by the Organization of Chinese American Women. She lives in Los Angeles.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

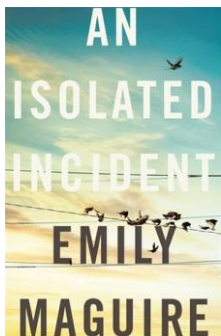
Discussion Questions

1. What was your favourite part of the book?
2. Did you race to the end?
3. Did you reread any passages? If so, which ones?
4. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
5. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
6. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
7. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
8. What surprised you most about the book?
9. Is this book overrated or underrated?
10. Did this book remind you of any other books?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



An Isolated Incident

Emily Maguire

About this Book

When 25-year-old Bella Michaels is brutally murdered in the small town of Strathdee, the community is stunned and a media storm descends. Unwillingly thrust into the eye of that storm is Bella's beloved older sister, Chris, a barmaid at the local pub, whose apparent easygoing nature conceals hard-won wisdom and the kind of street-smarts only experience can bring. As Chris is plunged into despair and searches for answers, reasons, explanation - anything - that could make even the smallest sense of Bella's death, her ex-husband, friends and neighbours do their best to support her. But as the days tick by with no arrest, Chris's suspicion of those around her grows.

About the Author

Emily Maguire is the author of five novels, including the Miles Franklin Award and Stella Prize shortlisted *An Isolated Incident*, and two works of non-fiction. Emily's articles and essays on sex, feminism, culture, and literature have been published widely including in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Observer* and *The Age*.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. 'We encourage people to walk together, females to walk together, but if you're by yourself you just need to be aware of your circumstances, take reasonable precautions.' –Detective Inspector Michael Hughes of Victoria Police, as quoted in news outlets. Mr. Hughes drew substantial criticism for making these statements, among others, regarding women's behaviour in the wake of the murder of a young woman in a Melbourne park. Do you think comments like his are helpful in the wake of a tragedy?
2. 'The local rumour mill churned with speculation that the killer or killers of Bella Michaels may have struck again, but all such talk stopped with the arrest of 24-year-old Bradley Miller.' (p 113) Small towns are notorious for their overactive "rumour mills" but are also considerably insular and private. How do you think community response to senseless crime or tragedy differs in a small town compared to a large city?
3. 'The first time a man hit me I was fourteen.' (p 151) 'Someone who's been hit as much as me should've known that seeing a blow coming, asking for it even, doesn't make it hurt any less.' (p 2) The insidiousness of domestic violence is threaded throughout this novel. Chris has been the victim of domestic violence at the hands of a number of perpetrators throughout her life. How do you think these shapes her understanding of and relationship with men?
4. 'Look, yes, two years before I met him, Nate spent a month in jail for breaking his girlfriend's nose. He would have spent longer, but the fact she'd first slashed his chest with a broken bottle meant the judge went easier on him. Nate got sober right after it happened and stayed that way for almost six years.' (pp 110-1) While condemning the violence and controlling behaviour of some men, Chris excuses and justifies her ex-husband's behaviour. What does this tell us about internalised victim-blaming?
5. 'You know, I've often been told I'm too trusting, too generous, too open. I used to think these were compliments, but recently I've come to realise that they are not. They say "trusting" and mean "stupid", "generous" and mean "easy", "open" and mean "shameless".' (p 9) Discuss the euphemisms that people use to subtly disapprove of women's behaviour. What other seemingly positive attributes have you heard used in this way?
6. 'The more he acts like a goddamn macho bikie sergeant the more I worry about him being smashed up and broken.' (p 35) Discuss the societal pressures that men feel to hide emotion or vulnerability behind machismo. Is physical aggression the logical boiling point of this kind of pressure?
7. 'Next day I was so hungover I could barely open my eyes, but when I did, I saw in his face that he would never forgive me and he never really has.' (p 111) The correlation between alcoholism and a range of anti-social behaviour is addressed a number of times in *An Isolated Incident*. In Australia, politicians and media personalities frequently blame 'alcohol-fueled violence' for late night fights, physical and sexual attacks and 'coward punches'. To what extent do you feel alcohol (or other substances) can or should be blamed for the behaviour of those under its influence?
8. As Chris spirals to the depths of her despair, she begins to see and hear Bella around her home. Do you think these are hallucinations or visits by a ghost? Or perhaps something in between?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Jane in Love

Rachel Givney

About This Book

At age twenty-eight, Jane Austen should be seeking a suitable husband, but all she wants to do is write. She is forced to take extreme measures in her quest to find true love – which lands her in the most extraordinary of circumstances.

Magically, she finds herself in modern-day England, where horseless steel carriages line the streets and people wear very little clothing. She forms a new best friend in fading film star Sofia Wentworth, and a genuine love interest in Sofia's brother Fred, who has the audacity to be handsome, clever and kind-hearted.

About the Author

Rachel Givney is a writer and filmmaker originally from Sydney, Australia (currently based in Melbourne). She has worked on *Offspring*, *The Warriors*, *McLeod's Daughters*, *Rescue: Special Ops* and *All Saints*. Her films have been official selections at the Sydney Film Festival, Flickerfest and many more.

citylibraries

-  enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
-  www.townsville.qld.gov.au
-  Townsville City Council
-  @TCC_News

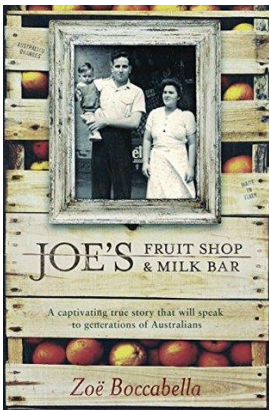
Discussion Questions

1. What did you most enjoy about the book?
2. Is the novel *Jane in Love* a comedy or a tragedy?
3. Jane and Sofia form the most unlikely of friendships, but in what ways are they similar?
4. What qualities did Jane find so appealing in Fred? Were they a perfect match?
5. What were some of the more amusing observations Jane made about life in the twenty-first century?
6. Do you think Jane or Sofia had the greater triumph in the end?
7. The novel asks the question: 'If Jane Austen had to choose between the heart and the pen, what would she do?' In your opinion, did Jane ultimately make the right decision?
8. From Jane Austen's era, the list of female artists who had either disastrous romantic lives or none runs long. Do you think women needed to be alone and unhappy to create art? How has that changed in modern times?
9. Why do you think the appeal of Jane Austen's novels has only increased over time?
10. Who would you like to see play the roles of Jane, Fred and Sofia in a movie adaptation?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Joe's Fruit Shop and Milk Bar

Zoë Boccabella

About This Book

'Nonno Anni gives me a nudge. "You know, when I first came to Australia, I knew that my life would change forever." Leaving the small village of Fossa in Italy in 1939 to meet a father he barely remembered in a place that was far from everything he knew, fifteen-year-old Annibale Boccabella arrived in Australia determined to make a go of it. It was a time when everything was changing and anything seemed possible. Life was tough but you could still chase your dreams.

More than 70 years later, in 2011, Zoë Boccabella and her family hurriedly try to save the treasured belongings of Annibale and his wife Francesca-Zoë's grandparents-from the rising waters of the Brisbane River. When Zoë sees the sign from their old fruit shop and milk bar about to disappear beneath the floodwater, this triggers in her a realisation that while she has long looked to Italy to discover her migrant heritage, much of it happened here in Australia.

In *Joe's Fruit Shop and Milk Bar*, Zoë artfully weaves her own experiences with those of her grandparents, taking us on a journey from Abruzzo and Calabria in Italy to Australian sugar cane fields, internment camps, Greek cafes, and the fruit shop and milk bar that was the focus of a family's hopes and dreams for the future.

About the Author

Zoë Boccabella was born and grew up in Brisbane. Her writing is often influenced by her migrant ancestry, handed-down recipes and spoken histories as well as travels in Europe and her birth country, Australia. She gained an Arts degree in literature and sociology then worked for many years as a writer and researcher for government, universities and freelance, later attaining a Master of Philosophy in writing. Zoë's books have been much acclaimed and also shortlisted for awards in both popular and literary categories. She is currently working on her next book.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

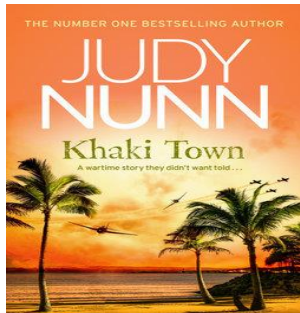
Discussion Questions

1. For the person who chose the book: what made you want to read this book and suggest it to the group for discussion?
2. Was the book written in a way that made it easily accessible?
3. What was your view of the women/girls in this book – what they endured and how they approached duty, sacrifice and hardships?
4. Similarly, what was your view of the men/boys in this book – what was expected of them and how they approached responsibilities and challenges?
5. What did you find most surprising or intriguing in the book – was there a passage that struck you or had a particular effect on you?
6. Before reading this book, how aware were you of the internments that occurred in Australia during the Second World War?
7. Has this book changed your perspective on an issue? Did it give you a new or different idea about certain people or parts of Italy or Australia?
8. Did the book conjure your own memories of the 'milk bar' era?
9. Would you recommend this book to someone you know? Do you want to read more works by this author or more about the book's subject?



Townsville

Book Club Reading Notes



Khaki Town

Judy Nunn

About This Book

'It seems to have happened overnight,' Val thought as she pulled the beers. 'We've become a khaki town.'

It's March 1942. Singapore has fallen. Darwin has been bombed. Australia is on the brink of being invaded by the Imperial Japanese Forces. And Val Callahan, publican of The Brown's Hotel in Townsville, could not be happier as she contemplates the fortune she's making from lonely, thirsty soldiers.

Then one night a massive street fight leaves a black soldier lying dead in the street, and the situation explodes into violent confrontation.

About The Author

Judy Nunn's career has been long, illustrious and multifaceted. After combining her internationally successful acting career with scriptwriting for television and radio, Judy decided in the 80s to turn her hand to prose.

citylibraries

 enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
 www.townsville.qld.gov.au
 Townsville City Council
 @TCC_News

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

Discussion Questions

1. What was your favourite part of the book?
2. Did you race to the end, or was it more of a slow burn?
3. Did you reread any passages? If so, which ones?
4. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
5. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
6. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
7. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
8. What surprised you most about the book?
9. Is this book overrated or underrated?
10. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?