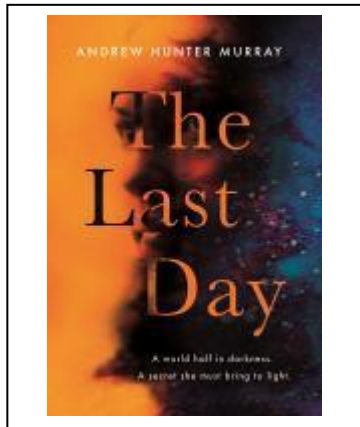




Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Last Day

Andrew Hunter Murray

### About This Book

2059. The world has stopped turning. One half suffers an endless frozen night; the other, nothing but burning sun. Only in a slim twilight region can life survive. In an isolationist Britain, Ellen Hopper receives a letter from a dying man. It contains a powerful and dangerous secret. One that those in power will kill to conceal

### About The Author

Andrew Hunter Murray is a writer from London. For ten years, Andrew has been one of the writers and researchers behind the BBC show QI. He is one of the co-hosts of QI's spin-off podcast, No Such Thing As A Fish, which since 2014 has released 250 episodes.

Andrew also writes jokes and journalism for Private Eye magazine, and hosts the Eye's in-house podcast, Page 94. In his spare time he performs in the award-winning comedy show Austentatious, which plays in London's West End and around the UK.

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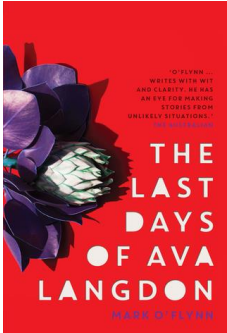
## Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"?
2. What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?
3. 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?
4. Has this novel broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?
5. Have any of YOUR views or thoughts changed after reading this book?
6. Are there any books that you would compare this one to? How does this book hold up to them?
7. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not
8. Would you recommend this book to a friend or family member?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Last Days of Ava Langdon**

**Mark O'Flynn**

## About This Book

It's been twenty years since Ava Langdon published her much-lauded novel *The Apple Pickers*, but today could very well be the day her genius is finally recognised again. Armed with a freshly completed manuscript, a yellow cravat and a machete, Ava strides out into the world in the hope of being published – and so the adventure begins. Despite being dismissed as an eccentric – or worse – by the world around her, and battling poverty and age, Ava's internal world remains vivid; her purpose, clear. Author Mark O'Flynn first learned about legendary Blue Mountains writer and recluse Eve Langley when he stumbled across her abandoned hut outside the small town of Leura. Though he moved on to other projects, Langley's voice stayed with him: 'Why did she change her name (by deed poll) to Oscar Wilde? Why the romantic preoccupation with her past? So little is known of her final days.' O'Flynn's fascination with her life eventually led to the creation of the irrepressible Ava Langdon. Rich in wordplay and colourful anecdote, *The Last Days of Ava Langdon* is an intimate, witty and soulful conjuring of a once-great artist in her final days, which will leave the reader questioning – what passion would sustain you if everything was lost?

## About The Author

Mark O'Flynn was born on September 17, 1958 in Melbourne, Australia. He studied at the Victorian College of the Arts. He worked in the theatre and had several plays produced. He had several works of poetry published which included *The Too Bright Sun*, *The Good Oil*, *What Can Be Proven*, and most recently *The Soup's Song*. His other works include a novella *Captain Cook*, a play *Paterson's Curse*, and his memoir *False Start, A Memoir of things Best Forgotten*. His novels include *Grassdogs*, *The Forgotten World*, *White Light*, and *The Last Days of Ava Langdon*.

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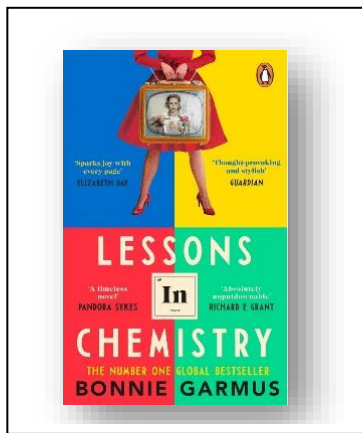
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## Discussion Questions

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?



# Book Club Reading Notes



## Lessons in Chemistry

Bonnie Garmus

### About This Book

Your ability to change everything - including yourself - starts here.

Chemist Elizabeth Zott is not your average woman. In fact, Elizabeth Zott would be the first to point out that there is no such thing.

But it's the early 1960s and her all-male team at Hastings Research Institute take a very unscientific view of equality. Forced to resign, she reluctantly signs on as the host of a cooking show, Supper at Six. But her revolutionary approach to cooking, fueled by scientific and rational commentary, grabs the attention of a nation.

Soon, a legion of overlooked housewives find themselves daring to change the status quo. One molecule at a time.

### About The Author

Bonnie Garmus is a copywriter and creative director who's worked widely in the fields of technology, medicine, and education. She's an open-water swimmer, a rower, and mother to two pretty amazing daughters. Born in California and most recently from Seattle, she currently lives in London with her husband and her dog, 99.

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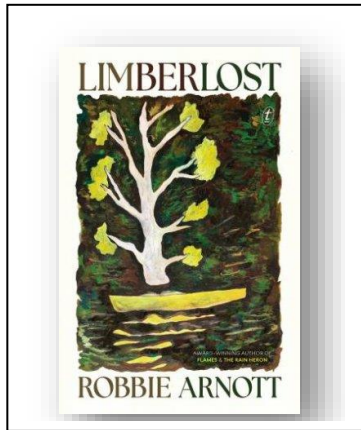


## Discussion Questions

1. How does the novel's protagonist, Elizabeth Zott, evolve as a character from the beginning of the story to the end? What are the key turning points in her life?
2. The book address's themes of gender inequality and sexual assault in the scientific and academic fields. How does the author depict the challenges that Elizabeth faces as a female chemist, and how does she overcome them?
3. Discuss the relationship between Elizabeth and Calvin Evans. How does their initial meeting contrast with their later interactions and eventual romantic involvement? What role does their relationship play in the story?
4. How does the character of Six-Thirty, the explosive detection dog, contribute to the narrative, and what does the dog symbolize throughout the book?
5. Analyse the role of language and communication in the story, particularly the unique connection between Elizabeth and Six-Thirty, who begins to teach her unborn child words. What does this signify in the novel?
6. Elizabeth's journey takes her from working as a chemist to becoming a cooking show host. How does her unconventional personality influence her success in the entertainment industry, and what does it reveal about societal expectations of women?
7. What are the ethical dilemmas and struggles that Elizabeth faces during her career, especially in her interactions with colleagues and superiors at Hastings Research Institute?
8. How does the character of Madeline, Elizabeth's daughter, impact her mother's life and choices? What do you make of Madeline's quest to uncover information about her biological father?
9. The novel highlights the power of investigative journalism and the impact of an article on Elizabeth's life. How does the media play a role in shaping public perception and personal narratives in the story?
10. Explore the theme of second chances and redemption in the book. How do the characters' actions and choices lead to opportunities for personal growth and change?



# Book Club Reading Notes



**Limberlost**

**Robbie Arnott**

## About This Book

In the heat of a long summer Ned hunts rabbits in a river valley, hoping the pelts will earn him enough money to buy a small boat. His two brothers are away at war, their whereabouts unknown. His father and older sister struggle to hold things together on the family orchard, Limberlost. Desperate to ignore it all to avoid the future rushing towards him-Ned dreams of open water. As his story unfolds over the following decades, we see how Ned's choices that summer come to shape the course of his life, the fate of his family and the future of the valley, with its seasons of death and rebirth. The third novel by the award-winning author of *Flames* and *The Rain Heron*, *Limberlost* is an extraordinary chronicle of life and land- of carnage and kindness, blood ties and love.

## About The Author

Robbie Arnott's acclaimed debut, *Flames* (2018), won a Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Novelist award and a Tasmanian Premier's Literary Prize, and was shortlisted for a Victorian Premier's Literary Award, a New South Wales Premier's Literary Award, a Queensland Literary Award, the Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction and the Not the Booker Prize. His follow-up, *The Rain Heron* (2020), won the Age Book of the Year award, and was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, the ALS Gold Medal, the Voss Literary Prize and an Adelaide Festival Award. He lives in Hobart.

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## Discussion Questions

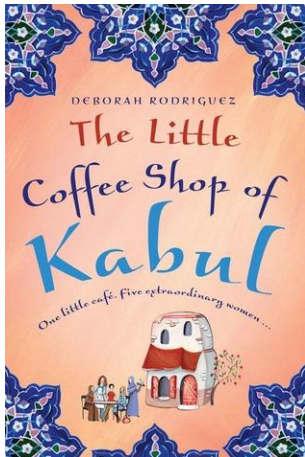
1. The novel weaves together the past and the present, focusing on the life of Ned and his experiences interspersed with scenes from one summer. How does this narrative structure enhance the storytelling and our understanding of Ned's character?
2. Ned's connection to the natural world is a central theme in the book. How does the author use lyrical language to convey the relationship between Ned and his environment, particularly in his interactions with animals and landscapes?
3. Ned is deeply attached to his brothers, Bill and Toby, who are serving in World War II. How does the fear of losing them shape Ned's character and his aspirations throughout the story?
4. The novel explores the themes of love, fear of loss, and joy. In what ways do these themes manifest in the lives of the characters, especially Ned and his family?
5. The removal of Captain Cook's statue is a significant subplot that allows the reader to delve into issues related to history, symbolism, and colonization. How does this event impact the characters and the broader narrative?
6. Ned is portrayed as a quiet and observant character who often struggles to express himself verbally. How does this aspect of his personality shape his relationships and interactions with others, including his family?
7. The novel introduces elements of magical realism, such as the man made of fire and the bird made of rain from Arnott's previous novels. How does this magical realism enhance the storytelling in "Limberlost"?
8. The story is set in both Australia and England. How do the descriptions and imagery of these settings contribute to the overall atmosphere and themes of the novel?
9. Robbie Arnott's use of enchanting language and metaphors adds depth to the narrative. Discuss some of the evocative language and imagery used in the book and how it enhances the reader's experience.
10. Ultimately, "Limberlost" is a novel about discovering the magic of love within one's family. How does Ned's journey throughout the story lead to this realization, and what does the novel convey about the power of familial bonds?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Little Coffee Shop of Kabul

Deborah Rodriguez

### About This Book

After hard luck and heartbreak, Sunny finally finds a place to call home—in the middle of an Afghanistan war zone. There, the thirty-eight-year-old serves up her American hospitality to the expats who patronize her coffee shop, including a British journalist, a “danger pay” consultant, and a wealthy and well-connected woman. True to her name, Sunny also bonds with people whose language and landscape are unfamiliar to most Westerners, but whose hearts and souls are very much like our own: the maternal Halajan, who vividly recalls the days before the Taliban and now must hide a modern romance from her ultratraditional son; and Yazmina, a young Afghan villager with a secret that could put everyone’s life in jeopardy. In this gorgeous first novel, New York Times bestselling author Deborah Rodriguez paints a stirring portrait of a faraway place where—even in the fog of political and social conflict—friendship, passion, and hope still exist.

### About The Author

Deborah Rodriguez is a hairdresser, a motivational speaker, and the author of the bestselling memoir *Kabul Beauty School*.

She spent five years teaching at and later directing the *Kabul Beauty School*, the first modern beauty academy and training salon in Afghanistan. Rodriguez also owned the *Oasis Salon* and the *Kabul Coffee House*.

She currently lives in Mexico.

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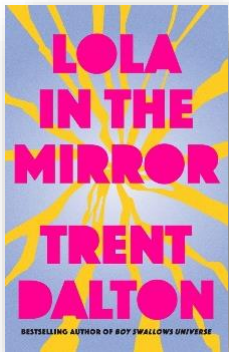
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## Discussion Questions

1. Who was your favourite character, and why?
2. Of all the characters in the story, who do you think was the most brave and/or inspiring?
3. A working title for this novel was *The Seventh Dove*. What does Halajan's story about the doves mean, and why does it have such a strong effect on Sunny?
4. 'Every character in the novel is hiding something.' Do you agree with this statement? Discuss each character's secrets and subterfuges.
5. Five women are at the heart of this novel. But what do you think of their presentation of men?
6. Did anything surprise you about the portrayal of Yazmina and Halajan? What facets of their characters stood out for you?
7. What was the most shocking thing you learnt about life for women in Afghanistan?
8. This book has received mixed reviews from literary critics. One point of contention is the "Westernization" of the story as it is written from an American author's perspective. Do you agree or disagree with this perception? Why or why not?
9. Was Ahmet's dramatic personality change at the end of the novel plausible to you? Why or why not? Could you empathize with the character?



# Book Club Reading Notes



**Lola in the Mirror**

**Trent Dalton**

## About This Book

A girl and her mother are on the lam. They've been running for sixteen years, from police and the monster they left in the kitchen with the knife in his throat. They've found themselves a home inside an orange 1987 Toyota HiAce van with four flat tyres parked in a scrapyard by the edge of the Brisbane. The girl has no name because names are dangerous when you're on the run. But the girl has a dream. A vision of a life as a groundbreaking artist of international acclaim. There's only one person who can help make her dreams come true. That person's name is Lola and she carries all the answers. But to find Lola, the girl with no name must first do one of the hardest things we can sometimes ever do. She must look in the mirror.

## About The Author

Trent Dalton is an award-winning journalist at The Weekend Australian Magazine. His writing includes several short and feature-length film screenplays. He was nominated for a 2010 AFI Best Short Fiction screenplay award for his latest film, Glenn Owen Dodds, which also won the prestigious International Prix Canal award at the world's largest short film festival, the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival. Dalton's debut feature film screenplay, In the Silence, is currently in production.

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## Discussion Questions

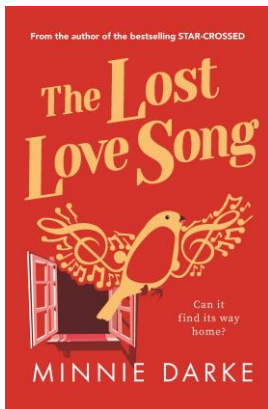
1. How would you describe Trent Dalton's writing style in "Lola in the Mirror"? What do you think of his signature style of blending real-life experiences with imaginative flights?
2. The protagonist in the story remains unnamed. How does this choice of anonymity impact your connection with the character and the narrative?
3. The book explores themes such as family dynamics, domestic violence, drug addiction, housing crisis, and criminal activities. How effectively does the author address these issues? Are there any particular moments that resonated with you?
4. Lola is portrayed as a doppelganger counterpart to the protagonist. How does the concept of Lola as an alter ego add depth to the narrative? What do you think Lola represents in the story?
5. Discuss the significance of the black and white illustrations with titles like 'Mum in the Jumper that Loves her Scars, Walking Silently by the Brisbane River' and 'Petrol Station Attendant with Busted Lip' at the beginning of each chapter. How do they contribute to the overall storytelling?
6. What role does hope play in the novel? How is hope portrayed as a powerful force that helps the characters overcome challenges?
7. The author uses elements of magical realism throughout the story. Can you identify instances of magical realism in the book, and how do these elements contribute to the narrative?
8. Lola in the Mirror is set in contemporary Brisbane. How does the setting influence the story, and what do you think it adds to the overall atmosphere and themes?
9. The book features both larger-than-life, compassionate characters and heavy-handed antagonists. How does the author create a balance between these character types, and which character stood out to you the most?
10. The review mentions that the novel is a fairy tale that has been "rolled around in the detritus of the streets." What do you think this statement means, and how does it encapsulate the essence of the book?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Lost Love Song

Minnie Darke

### About This Book

This is the story of a love song. And like any good love song, it has two parts. In Australia, Arie Johnson waits impatiently for classical pianist Diana Clare to return from a world tour, hopeful that after seven years together she will finally agree to marry him. On her travels, Diana composes a song for Arie. It is the perfect way to express her love, knowing they will spend their lives together... Won't they?

Then late one night, her love song is overheard, and begins its own journey across the world.

In Scotland, Evie Greenlees is drifting. It has been years since she left Australia with a backpack, a one-way ticket and a dream of becoming a poet. Now she spends her days making coffee and her nights serving beer. And she is not even sure whether the guy she lives with is really her boyfriend or just a flat mate.

Then one day she hears an exquisite love song. One that will connect her to a man with a broken heart.

### About the Author

Minnie Darke is the author of the bestselling novel *Star-crossed*, winner of the Margaret Scott People's Choice Award, and which has now been published in over 30 countries. She lives in Tasmania with her family.

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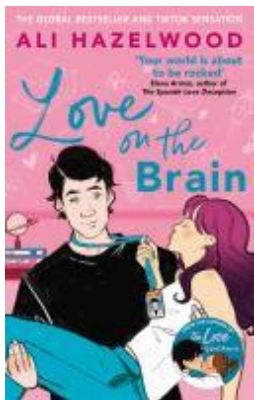
## Discussion Questions

1. Early in this book, there is a tragedy. Did this surprise you, or did you see it coming? When it happened, how did you feel?
2. What did you make of the relationship between Arie and Belinda? Does Belinda have unreasonable expectations of Arie, or does he have unreasonable expectations of himself?
3. Is Evie more perfect for Arie than Diana? Why, or why not?
4. While Diana expresses herself through music, Evie expresses herself through a different art form altogether. Did you enjoy her poems?
5. Is Evie right to leave Melbourne without telling Arie where she is going? Or is that a mistake?
6. The interludes in *The Lost Love Song* tell of a range of different types of love, including the love between a father and his teenage daughter, first love, love between brothers, and love on the cusp of a lifetime commitment. Which of the interlude sections meant the most to you?
7. Felix and Beatrix's story is one of powerful first love. Did you experience a first love like theirs?
8. Do certain songs take you back to moments in your life? If so, which songs, and which moments? Do you and your partner (if you have one) have a song that you consider to be 'your song'? What is it, and do you think it means the same thing to each of you?
9. The song at the heart of this story travels long distances to find its way home. Do you think the song has a mind of its own?
10. What do you imagine will happen next for the characters in *The Lost Love Song*?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Love on the Brain**

**Ali Hazelwood**

## About This Book

Bee Koenigswasser lives by a simple code: What would Marie Curie do? If NASA offered her the lead on a neuroengineering project, a literal dream come true, Marie would accept without hesitation. Duh. But the mother of modern physics never had to co-lead with Levi Ward. Sure, Levi is attractive in a tall, dark, and piercing-eyes kind of way. But Levi made his feelings toward Bee very clear in grad school, archenemies work best employed in their own galaxies far, far away. But when her equipment starts to go missing and the staff ignore her, Bee could swear she sees Levi softening into an ally, backing her plays, seconding her ideas, devouring her with those eyes. The possibilities have all her neurons firing. But when it comes time to actually make a move and put her heart on the line, there's only one question that matters: What will Bee Koenigswasser do?

## About The Author

Ali Hazelwood is the pen name of an Italian neuroscience professor and writer of romance novels. Her stories center around women in STEM fields and academia. Her debut novel, *The Love Hypothesis*, was a New York Times best seller.

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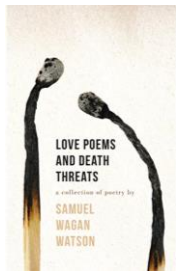
## Discussion Questions

1. Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare.
2. What were the themes of the book? Were they brought to life in a cliché or in a unique manner?
3. What did you like or dislike?
4. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
5. What scene resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way? Why?
6. What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?
7. Would you give this book as a gift? If so, who would you give it to?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Love Poems and Death Threats**

**Samuel Wagan Watson**

## About This Book

From acclaimed poet Samuel Wagan Watson comes a much-anticipated volume that is both wild and dynamic in its flair and vision, mapping the song lines – the poem lines – of an Australia scarred by invasion and injustice, but brimming, too, with the vital energies of creativity and resilience. With striking immediacy, Watson's often satirical take on contemporary Australia, with its acquisitiveness and materialism, bears witness to an ancient culture protesting against the implacable march of development. Honest, powerful and compelling, this new collection from one of Australia's most recognized indigenous poets reveals the ways love might go wrong, but, equally, its transformative power to heal and resonate in unexpected ways.

## About The Author

Hailing from honourable ancestors of the Birri-Gubba, Mununjali, Germanic and Gaelic peoples, Samuel Wagan Watson grew up in a family of accomplished authors, political players, entrepreneurs, academics, artists and raconteurs. His collection of poetry *Of Muse, Meandering and Midnight* won the 1999 David Unaipon prize for unpublished Indigenous writers. Since then he has written four more collections: *Itinerant Blues* (2001); *Hotel Bone* (2001, Vagabond Press); *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* (2004), which won the New South Wales Premier's Book of the Year and the Kenneth Slessor Prize; and *The Curse Words* (2011, Vagabond Press). His work has been translated into seven languages, inspired various musical compositions, and been the subject of film and television productions and visual art projects.

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## Discussion Questions

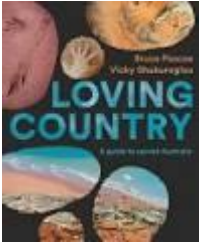
1. If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ... What observations are made in the book?
  - a) Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
  - b) 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?
  - c) 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. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
4. 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?





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# Book Club Reading Notes



## Loving Country

Co-authors Bruce Pascoe and Vicky Shukuroglou

### About This Book

Loving Country is a book that inspires ultimate respect for Mother Earth and the role of her custodians. While readers are encouraged to discover the sacred country of Australia in an open-minded and sensitive manner, the intention of this book is to foster communication and understanding between all peoples and country, to bring about a range of environmental and social changes. Co-authors Bruce Pascoe and Vicky Shukuroglou hope to empower communities to tell their own stories, and for people to honour them and the country from which they have grown. Beautifully designed, all the writing and photography in Loving Country has been created in consultation with communities.

### 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.

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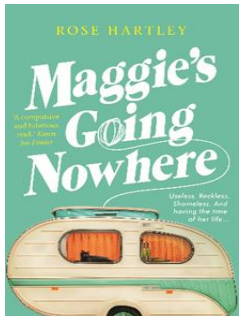
## Discussion Questions

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



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Maggie's Going Nowhere**

**Rose Hartley**

## About This Book

'A compulsive and hilarious read. In Maggie, Hartley has created one of those indelible characters of whom we must thoroughly disapprove and yet cannot help but love.' Karen Joy Fowler

Maggie Cotton's life is a hot mess.

In one day, she is dumped by her boyfriend, disinherited by her mum, and kicked out of the three-year degree she had stretched to a decade. And that was before she received the letter saying she owed the government \$70,000.

But that is no reason to grow up, is it?

With a decrepit 1960s caravan to call home, Maggie has to prove to her mother she can survive without a safety net, stop her loyal best friend Jen from marrying a scumbag, and convince her sexy workmate Rueben that she's not a walking disaster. For someone who is spent her life avoiding hard work, she sure can move mountains when she has got a little motivation – just do not ask her to move the caravan.

## About the Author

Rose Hartley is a graduate of the Clarion Writers' Workshop. She lives in Adelaide with her cat, Doris, and her 1962 caravan, Cecil. Maggie's Going Nowhere is her first novel.

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## Discussion Questions

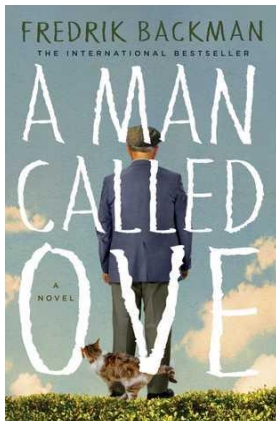
1. How do you feel about Maggie's behaviour at the start of the book? How do you feel about her at the end? When and how did your perception of her change?
2. The novel is told in the first person from Maggie's point of view, and Maggie has built a hard shell around herself. In what ways does the author convey Maggie's vulnerabilities?
3. Do you think Valerie was right to cut Maggie out of her will and throw her out of the house? What would you have done if you were Maggie's mum?
4. Why does the caravan feel like home to Maggie from the first moment she enters it? What does it symbolise in the story?
5. 'The cat was the only person none of us were embarrassed to love.' What bearing do you think Maggie's childhood and family dynamics have had on her adult life?
6. At one-point Rueben says, 'You do worry about what people think, Maggie.' Were you surprised by Maggie's embarrassment at the party when Jono reveals to everyone that she lives in a caravan?
7. Although Maggie's Going Nowhere could be described as a romantic comedy, the strongest relationship in the story is between Maggie and Jen. Do you agree with this statement?
8. Was Maggie wrong to want to split up Jen and Jono? Was it inevitable that Jen would choose Jono over her? How could Maggie have handled it differently?
9. 'He reminded me of myself,' Maggie says of Jono. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two characters.
10. At what point in the story do you think Maggie finally 'grows up'? Is Maggie still going nowhere at the end of the book?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**A Man Called Ove**

**Fredrik Backman**

## About This Book

A grumpy yet loveable man finds his solitary world turned on its head when a boisterous young family moves in next door. Meet Ove. He's a curmudgeon, the kind of man who points at people he dislikes as if they were burglars caught outside his bedroom window. He has staunch principles, strict routines, and a short fuse. People call him the bitter neighbor from hell, but must Ove be bitter just because he doesn't walk around with a smile plastered to his face all the time? Behind the cranky exterior there is a story and a sadness. So when one November morning a chatty young couple with two chatty young daughters move in next door and accidentally flatten Ove's mailbox, it is the lead-in to a comical and heartwarming tale of unkempt cats, unexpected friendship, and the ancient art of backing up a U-Haul. All of which will change one cranky old man and a local residents' association to their very foundations.

## About The Author

Fredrik Backman is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the novels *A Man Called Ove*, *My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry*, and *Britt-Marie Was Here*, as well as a novella, *And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer*. His books are being published around the world in more than thirty-five languages. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two children.

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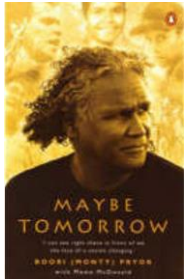
## Discussion Questions

1. How does the opening scene, in which Ove attempts to purchase a computer, succinctly express the main points of Ove's ongoing battle with the stupidities of the modern world?
2. Ove loves things that have a purpose, that are useful. How does this worldview fail him when he believes himself to be useless? How is he convinced that he can still be useful?
3. As readers, we get to know Ove slowly, with his past only being revealed piece by piece. What surprised you about Ove's past? Why do you think the author revealed Ove's past the way that he did?
4. We all know our own grumpy old men. How do Ove's core values lead him to appear as such a cranky old coot, when he is in fact nothing of the sort? Which of these values do you agree or disagree with?
5. Although Ove has some major "disagreements" with the way the world turned out, there are some undeniable advantages to the modernization he finds so hollow. How do these advantages improve Ove's life, even if he can't admit it?
6. Parvaneh's perspective on life, as radically different from Ove's as it is, eventually succeeds in breaking Ove out of his shell, even if she can't change his feelings about Saabs. How does her brash, extroverted attitude manage to somehow be both rude and helpful?
7. Ove strives to be "as little unlike his father as possible." Although this emulation provides much of the strength that helps Ove persevere through a difficult life, it also has some disadvantages. What are some of the ways that Ove grows into a new way of thinking over the course of the book?
8. Ove is a believer in the value of routine—how can following a routine be both comforting and stultifying? How can we balance routine and spontaneity? Should we? Or is there sense in eating sausage and potatoes your whole life?
9. The truism "it takes a village to raise a child" has some resonance with *A Man Called Ove*. How does the eclectic cast of posers, suits, deadbeats, and teens each help Ove in their own way?
10. Although we all identify with Ove to some extent, especially by the end of the story, we certainly also have our differences with him. Which of the supporting cast (Parvaneh, Jimmy, the Lanky One, Anita) did you find yourself identifying with most?
11. What did you make of Ove's ongoing battle with the bureaucracies that persist in getting in his way? Is Ove's true fight with the various ruling bodies, or are they stand-ins, scapegoats, for something else?
12. On page 113, after a younger Ove punches Tom, the author reflects: "A time like that comes for all men, when they choose what sort of men they want to be." Do you agree with this sentiment, especially in this context? How does the book deal with varying ideas of masculinity?
13. On page 246, the author muses that when people don't share sorrow, it can drive them apart. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
14. What do you think of Ove's relationship with the mangy cat he adopts? What does the cat allow him to express that he couldn't otherwise say?
15. On Ove and Sonja's trip to Spain, Ove spends his time helping the locals and fixing things. How does Ove the "hero" compare and contrast to his behavior in the rest of the book? Is that Ove's true personality?
16. Ove and Sonja's love story is one of the most affecting, tender parts of the book. What is the key to their romance? Why do they fit so well together?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Maybe Tomorrow**

**Boori Monty Pryor, Meme McDonald**

## About This Book

The other day this little one asked me, 'When did you start being an aborigine, and how old were you when you started that?' Like it was a career path or something. I just cracked up laughing.

Boori Monty Pryor's career path has taken him from the Aboriginal fringe camps of his birth to the catwalk, the basketball court, the DJ console, and now to performance and storytelling around the country. 'You've got to try and play the white man's game and stay black while you're doing it,' his brother used to tell him.

With writer and photographer Meme McDonald, Boori leads you along the paths he has travelled, pausing to meet his family and friends, while sharing the story of his life, his pain and his hopes, with humour and compassion.

## About the Authors

The first book Meme McDonald and Boori Monty Pryor wrote together was *Maybe Tomorrow*, the first edition of which is shortlisted for the 1999 Children's Book Council of Australia awards.

Boori Monty Pryor's family is from North Queensland. His mother's people are Kunggandji and his father is from the Birrigubba Nation. Boori is a performer, storyteller and didjeridoo player. In 1993 he received an award for the Promotion of Indigenous Culture from the National Aboriginal Islander Observance Committee.

Meme McDonald grew up in Western Queensland and began her career as a theatre director, specializing in epic outdoor performance events. Nine of her books have been published in a variety of genres. *Put Your Whole Self In*, Meme's first book, won the 1993 NSW State Literary Award for Non-fiction and the Braille and Talking Book Award. Her most recent novel is highly acclaimed *Love like Water*.

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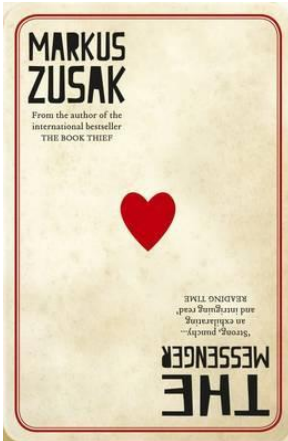
## Discussion Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
4. 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?
5. Do the issues affect your life? How so - directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Messenger**

**Markus Zusak**

## About This Book

Meet Ed Kennedy - cab driving prodigy, pathetic card player and useless at sex (self-proclaimed). He lives in a suburban shack, shares coffee with his dog, the Doorman, and he's in nervous love with Audrey. His life is one of peaceful routine and incompetence - until he inadvertently stops a bank robbery. That's when the first Ace turns up. That's when Ed becomes the messenger. Chosen to care, he makes his way through town, helping and hurting (where necessary) until only one question remains. Who's behind Ed's mission? *Protect the diamonds, survive the clubs, dig deep through spades, feel the hearts...* *The Messenger* is a cryptic journey filled with laughter, fists and love.

## About The Author

Markus Zusak was born in 1975 and is the author of five books, including the international bestseller, *The Book Thief*. He lives in Sydney with his wife and two children. His first three books, *The Underdog*, *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* and *When Dogs Cry*, released between 1999 and 2001, were all published internationally and garnered a number of awards in Australia. *The Messenger*, published in 2002, won the 2003 CBC Book of the Year Award (Older Readers) and the 2003 NSW Premier's Literary Award, (Ethel Turner Prize), as well as receiving a Printz Honour in America.

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## Discussion Questions

1. There are many ironies in Ed Kennedy's life. One is in the name of the company for which he works—Vacant Taxi Company. What is "vacant" in Ed's life?
2. What do you think his mother means when she says, "Believe it or not—it takes a lot of love to hate you like this."? Ed's mother says that his father promised to take her away. She resents the fact that he never did. How is Audrey's family similar to Ed's family?
3. Audrey says that she likes Ed too much to have sex with him, and he says that he wants more than sex from her. Why does Audrey think that sex would ruin their relationship? What does Ed want from Audrey? It is obvious that Audrey is having sex with other guys. How does her attitude toward casual sex indicate disrespect for herself? Ed eventually learns that Audrey is in love with him. Why is she reluctant to reveal her love for him? What might Ed offer her at the end of the novel that he was incapable of offering in the beginning?
4. Ed and his friends are in a bank when it is robbed. Is Ed in the wrong place at the right time or the right place at the wrong time?
5. After the robbery, Ed begins receiving the cards in the mail. How does Ed know that each mission he is handed is serious business?
6. One of Ed's first messages is to soothe Milla Johnson's loneliness by posing as her deceased husband. How does this experience show Ed the real meaning of love?
7. Then, Ed delivers a message to Sophie, the barefoot runner. Explain the courage that Ed learns from Sophie. What does Ed learn from each of the twelve messages that he delivers? How is each mission a lesson for the heart?
8. Ed says, "I want words at my funeral. But I guess that means that you need life in your life." How do the missions slowly put "life" in Ed's life?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Midnight Library

Matt Haig

### About This Book

Somewhere out beyond the edge of the universe there is a library that contains an infinite number of books, each one the story of another reality. One tells the story of your life as it is, along with another book for the other life you could have lived if you had made a different choice at any point in your life. While we all wonder how our lives might have been, what if you had the chance to go to the library and see for yourself? Would any of these other lives truly be better? Nora Seed finds herself faced with this decision. Faced with the possibility of changing her life for a new one, following a different career, undoing old breakups, realizing her dreams of becoming a glaciologist; she must search within herself as she travels through the Midnight Library to decide what is truly fulfilling in life, and what makes it worth living in the first place.

### About The Author

Matt Haig is an English Journalist and author of both fiction and non-fiction for children and adults and is known to blend the worlds of domestic reality and outright fantasy, with a quirky twist. His bestselling children's novel, *Father Christmas and Me*, is currently being adapted for film, produced by StudioCanal and Blueprint Pictures.

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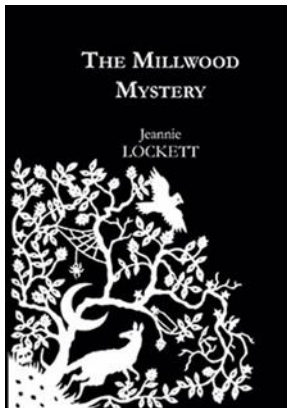
## Discussion Questions

1. If you somehow ended up in a place like The Midnight Library, how do you think you would handle it? Would you want to see all the different outcomes that your life could have taken?
2. Nora goes to so many different realities from marrying her ex-boyfriend to studying glaciers. Which alternate reality did you find the most interesting?
3. Let's now talk about Nora's relationship with the real-life Mrs. Elm. Why was this such a significant relationship for her?
4. Throughout the novel, Nora realizes how people blamed her for their own shortcomings. And that the different realities she chose, were based on hoping for a better outcome for her loved ones. Let's talk the significance of Nora realizing this. How did it help her move forward with her own life?
5. What did you think about the storyline where Nora marries Ash and has a daughter? Why wasn't she able to stay in this alternate reality?
6. What were some of the key realizations that made her want to go back to her original life?
7. How will things be different for Nora going forward? What happens next for her?
8. What are some of the takeaways from Nora's journey?
9. In your opinion, what's truly fulfilling in life?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Millwood Mystery**

**Jeannie Lockett**

## About This Book

Young Marjory Graham runs panicked from her home into the street in the middle of the night, distraught and wearing only her nightdress. When she wakes Dr Reade and returns with him to her home, they find her widowed stepmother, Barbara Graham, dead by poison. The inquest reveals numerous suspects, including Barbara's stepdaughter, her fiancé, and her sister-in-law to be. Whispers spread through the town. Who would do such a thing and why? Surely all was well. Or was it?

## About the Author

In her short life, Lockett successfully merged roles unusual for a woman of her time — wife and mother, writer, women's rights activist, teacher and mentor — and her legacy lives on for contemporary readers today

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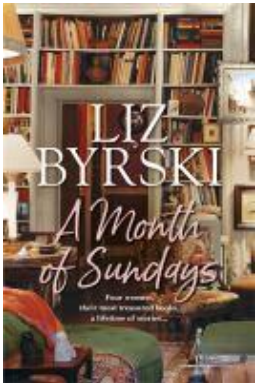
## Discussion Questions

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.





# Book Club Reading Notes



**A Month of Sundays**

**Liz Byrski**

## About This Book

Four women have been members of an online Bookclub for over ten years but have never met each other until now. When one is offered the use of a house in the Blue Mountains for a month, she invites the others to come along and asks them to each bring a book to share, that represents their lives, but they end up sharing so much more.

In writing this novel, Liz has reminded us all of the pleasure and comfort that can be gained from reading a good story.

## About the Author

Liz Byrski was born in London in 1944, and lived in England until 1981 when she and her family moved to Western. She now lives close to Fremantle and enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, writing, movies, swimming and walking her dog.

Liz is a novelist, non-fiction writer, former journalist and ABC broadcaster, with more than fifty years' experience in the British and Australian media. She is the author of ten bestselling novels and also the author of a dozen non-fiction books including the popular memoir, Remember Me; Getting On: Some Thoughts on Women and Ageing and In Love and War: Nursing Heroes.



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## Discussion Questions

1. Which character did you identify with the most and why?
2. Which character do you think is the most likeable?
3. Although told from multiple perspectives, do you think there's a main character? If so, who, and why?
4. Do you think that the setting of the Blue Mountains played a significant role in this novel or could the setting have been anywhere?
5. How big does a feminist sentiment run throughout this novel? What do you believe the issues either individually or collectively are?
6. The characters in this novel also discuss the ever-present topic of ageing and appearance. What makes Simone so comfortable with the prospect of ageing whilst Adele so fearful?
7. Would you agree that all main characters in this story are devoid of having a prominent male figure in their lives? Do you think that this was deliberate?
8. All four women in this novel are experiencing some form of identity crisis. What is the crisis for each woman?
9. Inextricably tied to the characters' questions of identity, is a sense of vulnerability. How significant a factor do you think vulnerability plays in all their lives? What are their vulnerabilities?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## Moonlight Plains

Barbara Hannay

### About This Book

In 1942, as the Japanese sweep towards northern Australia and allied troops swarm into Townsville, Kitty Martin is sent inland to the safety of Moonlight Plains. But when two American airmen crash on the isolated property, she is forced to grow up fast, coming face to face with tragedy, with love . . . and with heartbreak.

Years on, and Sally Piper, a young journalist, is sent to Moonlight Plains to cover the story of a cattleman turned builder who is restoring his grandmother's forgotten homestead. Sparks fly between them, but Sally is struggling to let go of the past, and Luke has his eyes fixed firmly on the future. What they uncover together is a shocking secret that has been kept safe for more than seventy years. Now the entire family's happiness is at stake – or does the truth about the past hold a valuable lesson for the future?

### About The Author

A former English teacher, Barbara Hannay is a city-bred girl with a yen for country life. Many of her forty-plus books are set in rural and outback Australia and have been enjoyed by readers around the world. She has won the RITA, awarded by Romance Writers of America, and has twice won the Romantic Book of the Year award in Australia. 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 and chickens and an untidy but productive garden.

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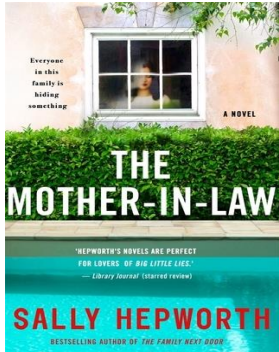
## Discussion Questions

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



**Mother-in-Law**

**Sally Hepworth**

## About This Book

A twisty, compelling novel about one woman's complicated relationship with her mother-in-law that ends in murder...

From the moment Lucy met her husband's mother, Diana, she was kept at arm's length. Diana was exquisitely polite, and properly friendly, but Lucy knew that she was not what Diana envisioned. But who could fault Diana? She was a pillar of the community, an advocate for social justice who helped female refugees assimilate to their new country. Diana was happily married to Tom and lived in wedded bliss for decades. Lucy wanted so much to please her new mother-in-law.

That was five years ago.

Now, Diana has been found dead, a suicide note near her body.

## About The Author

Sally Hepworth is the New York Times bestselling author of six novels, most recently *The Good Sister*, which was an instant bestseller.

Sally's books have been heralded "enchanted" by *The Herald Sun*, "smart and engaging" by *Publisher's Weekly*, and New York Times bestselling authors Liane Moriarty and Emily Giffin have praised Sally's novels as "women's fiction at its finest" and "totally absorbing".

Sally's novels are available worldwide in English and have been translated into 20 languages.

Sally lives in Melbourne, Australia with her husband and three children

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## Discussion Questions

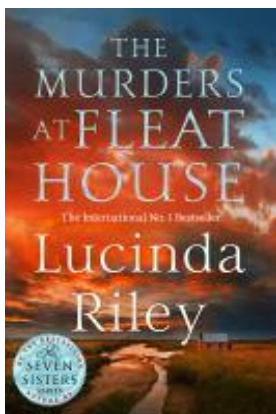
1. What was your favourite part of the book?
2. Did you reread any passages? If so, which ones?
3. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
4. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
5. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?
6. Would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





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Murders at Fleat House**

**Lucinda Riley**

## About This Book

The sudden death of a pupil in Fleat House at St Stephen's – a small private boarding school in deepest Norfolk – is a shocking event. The local police cannot rule out foul play and the case prompts the return of high-flying Detective Inspector Jazmine 'Jazz' Hunter to the force. As Jazz begins to probe the circumstances surrounding Charlie Cavendish's tragic death, events are soon to take another troubling turn. Charlie is exposed as an arrogant bully, and those around him had both motive and opportunity to switch the drugs he took daily to control his epilepsy. The disappearance of young pupil Rory Millar and the death of an elderly classics master provide Jazz with important leads, but are destined to complicate the investigation further. Then, a particularly grim discovery at the school makes this the most challenging murder investigation of her career. Because Fleat House hides secrets darker than even Jazz could ever have imagined.

## About The Author

Lucinda Riley was born in Northern Ireland, and after an early career as an actress in film, theatre and television, wrote her first book aged twenty-four. Her books have sold thirty million copies worldwide. She is a No.1 Sunday Times and New York Times bestseller. Lucinda and her family divided their time between the U.K. and a farmhouse in West Cork, Ireland, where she wrote her books.

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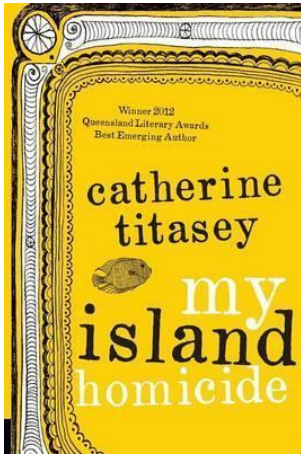
## Discussion Questions

1. How did the author use the atmosphere of the book to contribute to the story?
2. This is Lucinda Riley's only classic mystery – did you feel influences of other great British mystery writer's?
3. What did you think of Jazz's reasons for stepping away from police work and then agreeing to get involved in this case?
4. Is the ending satisfying?
5. Does the ending leave some issues unresolved, questions unanswered?
6. What do you know about the author?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**My Island Homicide**

**Catherine Titasey**

## About This Book

When Thea takes the job as Officer in Charge of the Thursday Island police station; she has no idea that her desire to start anew and return to her mother's Islander roots will be the greatest challenge of her life. Arriving with visions of enjoying a laid back, idyllic island lifestyle, What Thea finds instead is a close-knit community divided by a brutal crime. Rich in colour, texture and culture, My Island Homicide will take readers on a tropical adventure bursting with characters, crimes to be solved, courtroom drama, island humour, and romance.

## About The Author

Catherine Titasey was born in Sydney, raised in Papua New Guinea and travelled widely with her family and as a young adult. She studied law at The University of Queensland and then worked as a solicitor before taking an extended overseas adventure that ended on Thursday Island, a multicultural community in the Torres Strait. There she fell in love with Tony, a local fisherman. They have six children. In 2012, Catherine won the Queensland Literary Award for Emerging Queensland Author for this novel.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
2. Whose story did you enjoy the most? Was there any character you wanted more insight into?
3. Were there any notable racial, cultural, traditions, gender, sexuality or socioeconomic factors at play in the book? If so, how did it affect the characters? Do you think they were realistically portrayed?
4. What surprised you the most about the book?
5. Were there any particular quotes that stood out to you? Why?
6. What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?
7. How does the way the characters see themselves, differ from how others see them? How do you see the various characters?
8. Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters? What would you have done differently?
9. How have the characters changed by the end of the book?
10. Are there any books that you would compare this one to? How does this book hold up to them?
11. Did your opinion of the book change as you read it? How?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**My Pen is the Wing of a Bird**

**Lyse Doucet**

## About This Book

*My Pen Is the Wing of a Bird* is a landmark collection: the first anthology of short fiction by Afghan women. Eighteen writers tell stories that are both unique and universal - stories of family, work, childhood, friendship, war, gender identity and cultural traditions.

## About The Author

Lyse Doucet is a skilled Canadian journalist from New Brunswick currently working at BBC as a presenter correspondent since 2001. She attended and graduated from the University of Toronto where she earned a Master's Degree in International Relations and graduated from Queen's University at Kingston where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts Honors Degree. Doucet happens to be fluent in both English and French.

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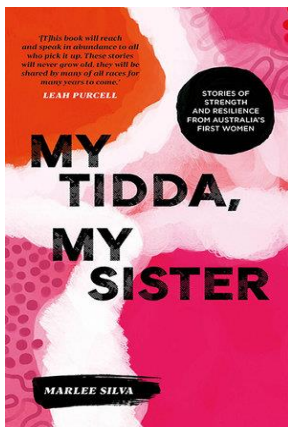
## Discussion Questions

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



**My Tidda, My Sister**

**Marlee Silva**

## About This Book

*My Tidda, My Sister* shares the experiences of many Indigenous women and girls, brought together by author and host of the Tiddas 4 Tiddas podcast, Marlee Silva. The voices of First Nations' women that Marlee weaves through the book provide a rebuttal to the idea that 'you can't be what you can't see'. For non-Indigenous women, it demonstrates the diversity of what success can look like and offers an insight into the lives of their Indigenous sisters and peers. Featuring colourful artwork by artist Rachael Sarra, this book is a celebration of the Indigenous female experience through truth-telling.

## About The Author

Marlee Silva is a proud Gamilaroi and Dunghutti woman born and raised in Dharrawal country, south of Sydney. Storytelling has always been a big part of Marlee's life. Her mum tells people she stopped reading bedtime stories to Marlee and her sister, Keely, by the time Marlee was five, because she'd started making them up herself. Even when Marlee ran into her kindergarten teacher a few years into university and told them she was studying creative writing, they laughed, 'No way, after all these years you're still telling stories?' It seems this was always meant to be her path.

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## Discussion Questions

1. How did this book make you feel?
2. Was there a particular moment that stuck in your mind?
3. Did you enjoy the journey of this book or struggle to finish it?
4. Can you relate to this book on a personal or emotional level?
5. How did this book impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
6. Did this book surprise you or did you find it predictable?
7. Would you consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
8. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?
9. Was this book what you expected?
10. Did you learn anything new while reading this book?



## Discussion Questions

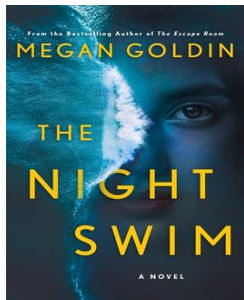
1. 'You need to know what you are' (p.18). Consider the statement by Boncer. 'What' are these girls – to society, the media, the guards, their families and partners? And how do these conflicting perceptions ultimately shape the girls' sense of self?
2. Compare and discuss your interpretations of 'Hardings International'. Who or what do they represent? And why do they want these girls removed from society?
3. In what ways do you think gender impacted your reading of the book? If you have men and women in your reading groups, discuss the different ways you related and reacted to the characters and events in the novel.
4. Consider the developing relationship between Yolanda and Verla. What brings them together and ultimately, sets them apart?
5. Discuss the ways the book addresses issues surrounding the female body. How do the girls view their bodies? In what ways are they sites of both power and oppression?
6. 'Animal blood and guts, the moon and the season. It was beyond her named self, beyond girl, or female. Beyond human, eve' (p.193). What power and promise does the animal world increasingly hold for Yolanda? How does going back to primitive state enable her to understand herself and her world?
7. Consider the conflicting representations of violence throughout the book. How does it challenge the boundaries between human and animal nature? Male and Female? Power and Oppression?
8. Throughout the book, Wood creates a powerful tension between death and survival. Why do some characters die while others endure?
9. What does the white horse symbolize for Verla?
10. 'In *the natural ways of things*, Wood creates a dystopian world through which we may better understand our own.' Discuss this statement.
11. What is your interpretation of the final scene? Where are the girls going? And what kind of world are they leaving behind?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Night Swim**

**Megan Goldin**

## About This Book

After the first season of her true crime podcast became an overnight sensation and set an innocent man free, Rachel Krall is now a household name—and the last hope for thousands of people seeking justice. But she's used to being recognized for her voice, not her face. Which makes it more unsettling when she finds a note on her car windshield, addressed to her, begging for help.

## About The Author

Megan Goldin is the bestselling author of "The Escape Room", praised by Lee Child as "one of my favorite books of the year", as well as "The Girl in Kellers Way", a critically acclaimed domestic noir thriller nominated for Australia's leading crime fiction awards. Megan worked as a journalist for Reuters, the Australian ABC and Yahoo! News before writing her debut psychological thriller The Girl in Kellers Way.

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## Discussion Questions

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



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Nightingale**

**Kristin Hannah**

## About This Book

Despite their differences, sisters Vianne and Isabelle have always been close. Younger, bolder Isabelle lives in Paris while Vianne is content with life in the French countryside with her husband Antoine and their daughter. But when the Second World War strikes, Antoine is sent off to fight and Vianne finds herself isolated so Isabelle is sent by their father to help her.

As the war progresses, the sisters' relationship and strength are tested. With life changing in unbelievably horrific ways, Vianne and Isabelle will find themselves facing frightening situations and responding in ways they never thought possible as bravery and resistance take different forms in each of their actions.

## About The Author

Kristin Hannah is the New York Times bestselling author of more than twenty novels, including the blockbuster bestsellers *The Nightingale* and *Firefly Lane*. She is a former lawyer turned writer and is the mother of one son. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband.

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## Discussion Questions

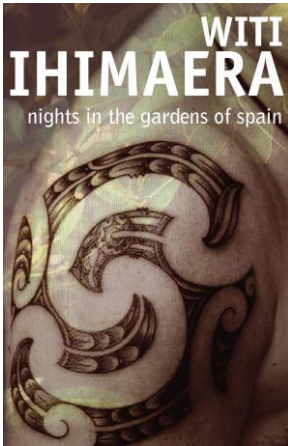
1. Though sisters, Isabelle and Vianne react to conflict and war in very different ways. Do you identify more with Isabelle's impetuous yet brave approach or Vianne's quiet strength?
2. When Christophe meets Isabelle, he scoffs at the idea that a woman can be a hero. How do the women in this book show heroism? Which men in this book would you describe as heroes, too?
3. When Isabelle is leaving Paris with the refugees, they "[shove] her forward, until she had no choice but to stumble along with them." In what aspects do the characters in this book go along with the actions and beliefs of those around them, and in what ways do they go against the crowd?
4. Isabelle wonders, "Why is it so easy for men in the world to do as they wanted and so difficult for women?" Times have changed in terms of gender equality since the 1940s, but do you think this still rings true in our world today?
5. As she lives with and learns more about Captain Beck, Vianne is torn between many emotions, including sympathy. Did you also find yourself feeling more sympathetic towards Beck as the novel progressed?
6. Vianne tells Isabelle, "[...] You're so strong and I'm not." Do you agree with her? In what ways is each sister both strong and weak?
7. After her friend and neighbor, Rachel, is taken away, Vianne takes in Rachel's young son, Ari, giving him a new identity as Daniel Mauriac, and forcing him to forget his old life. Is this unfair or justified given the danger he would face otherwise?
8. When members of Rachel's extended family are later found in America, Vianne is forced to give up Ari/Daniel so he can reunite with his relatives. Do you think this is what Rachel would have wanted?
9. Isabelle's father sacrifices his own life to save her. She realizes that he is "trying to make it up to her, asking for forgiveness and seeking redemption all at once." In your opinion, did this act accomplish that?
10. What was your reaction to the final scene between the two sisters, and to finally discovering the identity of the story's narrator? Was it in line with your expectations, or were you taken by surprise?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Nights in the Gardens of Spain**

**Witi Ihimaera**

## About This Book

David Munro has everything a man could want - a beautiful wife, two adoring daughters, a top academic position and a circle of devoted friends. But he also has another life, lived mainly at night and frequently in what he comes to know as 'The Gardens of Spain', the places where gay and bisexual men meet. Now he must choose which of these two lives to follow . . .

## About The Author

Witi Ihimaera is a novelist and short story writer from New Zealand, perhaps the best-known Māori writer today. He is internationally famous for *The Whale Rider*. Ihimaera is of Māori descent and Anglo-Saxon descent through his father, Tom. He attended Church College of New Zealand in Temple View, Hamilton, New Zealand. He was the first Māori writer to publish both a novel and a book of short stories. He began to work as a diplomat at the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1973, and served at various diplomatic posts in Canberra, New York, and Washington, D.C. Ihimaera remained at the Ministry until 1989, although his time there was broken by several fellowships at the University of Otago in 1975 and Victoria University of Wellington in 1982 (where he graduated with a BA). In 1990, he took up a position at the University of Auckland, where he became Professor, and Distinguished Creative Fellow in Māori Literature. He retired from this position in 2010.

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## Discussion Questions

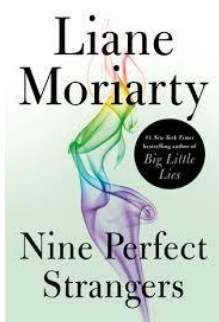


1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it
2. Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? Do they learn something about themselves and how the world works?
3. Is the plot 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?
4. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore?
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. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?
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?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## Nine Perfect Strangers

Liane Moriarty

### About This Book

The retreat at a health and wellness resort promises total transformation. Nine stressed city dwellers are keen to drop their literal and mental baggage and absorb the meditative ambience while enjoying their hot stone massages.

Watching over them is the resort's director, who is on a mission to reinvigorate their tired bodies and minds.

These nine perfect strangers have no idea of what is about to hit them.

### About The Author

Liane Moriarty is the Australian author of six internationally best-selling novels, *Three Wishes*, *The Last Anniversary*, *What Alice Forgot*, *The Hypnotist's Love Story* and the number 1 New York Times bestsellers, *The Husband's Secret* and *Big Little Lies*. Her breakout novel *The Husband's Secret* sold over three million copies world wide, was a number 1 UK bestseller, an Amazon Best Book of 2013 and has been translated into over 40 languages. It spent over a year on the New York Times bestseller list. CBS Films has acquired the film rights. With the launch of *Big Little Lies*, Liane became the first Australian author to have a novel debut at number one on the New York Times bestseller list. An HBO series based on *Big Little Lies* is currently in production, starring Nicole Kidman and Reese Witherspoon.

Writing as L.M. Moriarty, Liane has also written a children's book series, *The Petrifying Problem with Princess Petronella*, *The Shocking Trouble on the Planet of Shobble* and *The Wicked War on the Planet of Whimsy*.

Liane lives in Sydney with her husband, son and daughter.

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## Discussion Questions

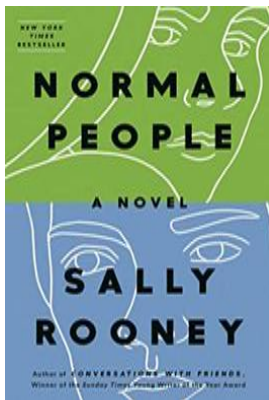
1. What was the significance of the title?
2. What were the main themes of the book? Do you believe that the theme was adequately covered ?
3. How important is the setting and the time period to the novel?
4. Did any of the characters remind you of yourself or someone else you know?
5. What surprised you most about the book?
6. What scene of book resonated personally with you the most in either a positive or negative way?
7. Have any of your views changed after reading this book? In what ways have they changed?
8. Are there any other books that you've read that are similar to this book?
9. What scene of the book was most pivotal to the overall story?
10. Which character did you like the most and why? Which did you like the least and why?





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# Book Club Reading Notes



**Normal People**

**Sally Rooney**

**About This Book**

At school Connell and Marianne pretend not to know each other. He's popular and well-adjusted, star of the school soccer team while she is lonely, proud, and intensely private. But when Connell comes to pick his mother up from her housekeeping job at Marianne's house, a strange and indelible connection grows between the two teenagers - one they are determined to conceal.

A year later, they are both studying at Trinity College in Dublin. Marianne has found her feet in a new social world while Connell hangs at the sidelines, shy and uncertain. Throughout their years in college, Marianne and Connell circle one another, straying toward other people and possibilities but always magnetically, irresistibly drawn back together. Then, as she veers into self-destruction and he begins to search for meaning elsewhere, each must confront how far they are willing to go to save the other.

## About the Author

Sally Rooney was born in 1991 and lives in Dublin, where she graduated from Trinity College. Her work has appeared in Granta, The Dublin Review, The White Review, The Stinging Fly, and the Winter Pages anthology.

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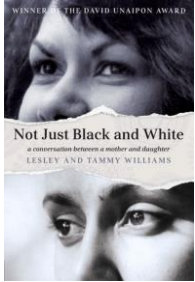
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## Discussion Questions

1. Were you critical of Connell for the way he treated Marianne in school, or were you sympathetic toward his adolescent self-consciousness? Do you think he became less concerned by the thoughts of others as he grew older?
2. Why do you think Connell is unsettled by the sense that Marianne would do anything to please him?
3. Do you think Marianne had ever been told that she was loved, in any sense of the word, by anyone before Connell? How can the experience of “first love” transform a person’s self-image and view of the world?
4. How does Marianne’s family influence her opinion of herself and affect her relationships with other people? How does she attempt to distance herself from her family? And how does Connell’s upbringing compare to Marianne’s?
5. How do class dynamics affect Connell and Marianne in Dublin? How do their reactions to class prejudice and snobbery shade your view of them as characters?
6. How would you describe the power that Connell and Marianne hold over each other? Did you notice a power relation shift and evolve between them over the years? How might it have had both positive and negative effects in different moments?
7. How does the structure of *Normal People*, oscillating between the experiences of both characters during this time, reveal the ways in which they misunderstood each other? How do you think their relationship would have turned out differently if Connell had stayed with Marianne that summer?
8. Do you think that Connell and Marianne could have ever had a normatively structured boyfriend-girlfriend relationship? Did reading this novel lead you to question why we tend to put rigid labels on our relationships?
9. At times, we see that Marianne considers herself intrinsically damaged, unlovable, and “bad.” In other words, she believes that she will never be a normal person. Having read about their innermost insecurities, feelings of alienation, sexual drives, desires, and so on, do you think that Connell and Marianne are any more or less “normal” than other people? What qualifies a person as normal, and do you think that such a completely normal person can exist?



# Book Club Reading Notes



**Not just Black and White**

**Lesley Williams and Tammy Williams**

## About This Book

Two remarkable women tell an inspirational story about the power of family and pursuing your dreams. Lesley Williams is forced to leave Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement and her family at a young age to work as a domestic servant. Apart from a bit of pocket money, Lesley never sees her wages – they are kept ‘safe’ for her and for countless others just like her. She is taught not to question her life, until desperation makes her start to wonder, where is all that money she earned? So begins a nine-year journey for answers which will test every ounce of her resolve. Inspired by her mother’s quest, a teenage Tammy Williams enters a national writing competition with an essay about injustice. The winning prize takes Tammy and Lesley to Michael Jackson’s Neverland Ranch and ultimately to the United Nations in Geneva. Along the way, they find courage they never thought they had and friendship in the most unexpected places. Told with honesty and humor, *Not Just Black and White* is an extraordinary memoir about two women determined to make sure history is not forgotten.

## About the Author

Lesley Williams is a respected Murri (Aboriginal) Elder, known for instigating the domestic and international Justice for Aboriginal Workers campaign. 2002 this campaign resulted in the Queensland State Government delivering an historic reparation package of \$55.4 million to all Indigenous workers who had their wages and savings controlled by past governments. 2003 she was awarded the Centenary Medal for her distinguished services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Lesley has co-produced and consulted on a number of documentary films including *The Ration Shed* and *For Their Own Good*, and co-wrote *On The Banks of the Barambah: A History of Cherbourg*. Tammy Williams is a Murri woman and was admitted as a barrister in 2002. Her legal career includes Commonwealth prosecutor and appointments to quasi-judicial bodies. She has been a member of the National Human Rights Consultative Committee and in 2003 was named the Queensland Women Lawyers Association Emergent Lawyer of the Year. Tammy was profiled in the documentary *Black Chicks Talking* and in 2011 was included in the International Women’s Day ‘Power of 100’ – a list of one hundred women who have helped to shape Australia.

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## Discussion Questions

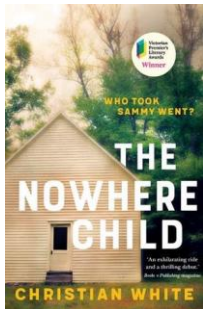
1. If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ... What observations are made in the book?
  - a. Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
  - b. 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?
  - c. 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?





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# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Nowhere Child

Christian White

### About This Book

On a break between teaching photography classes in Melbourne, Kim Leamy is approached by a stranger investigating the disappearance of a little girl from her Kentucky home twenty-eight years earlier. He believes Kim is that girl.

At first she brushes it off, but when Kim scratches the surface of her family history in Australia, questions arise that aren't easily answered. To find the truth, she must travel to Sammy's home of Manson, Kentucky, and into a dark past. As the mystery of Sammy's disappearance unravels and the town's secrets are revealed, this superb novel builds towards an electrifying climax.

### About the Author

Christian White is an Australian author and screenwriter. His debut novel, *The Nowhere Child*, won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an Unpublished Manuscript. He co-created the television series *Carnivores*, currently in development with Matchbox Pictures and Heyday TV, and co-wrote *Relic*, a psychological horror feature film to be produced by Carver Films (*The Snowtown Murders*, *Partisan*).

Born and raised on the Mornington Peninsula, Christian had a wide range of 'day jobs' before he was able to write full-time. He now spends his days writing from his home in Melbourne where he lives with his wife, and their adopted greyhound, Issy. He has a passion for true crime podcasts, Stephen King and anything to do with Bigfoot.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think this title was chosen for this novel? If you were able to change the title, what would you call it?
2. What conflicts (major or minor) were obvious in this novel? Were the conflicts resolved?
3. Who are the major characters in this story? Are the characters dynamic or do they remain the same throughout the book?
4. Do the characters seem real and believable? Would you have liked to have known more about any of the characters and if so, which character?
5. If the author was to write a sequel to this novel, what do you think would happen to each of the characters?
6. Which was your favourite character and why?
7. Discuss the plot of this story. Is it predictable or unpredictable?
8. Does this book have a satisfying end to it, or are you left up in the air? If the ending was unsatisfying, how would you change it?
9. Were you immediately able to become engaged in this story or was it difficult to get in to?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes

Stan  
Grant  
On  
Identity

**On Identity**

**Stan Grant**

## About This Book

Stan Grant explores how identity is being hijacked to incite hate

Stan Grant asks why when it comes to identity he is asked to choose between black and white. Is identity a myth? A constructed story we tell ourselves. Tribalism, nationalism and sectarianism are dividing the world into us and them. Communities are a tinderbox of anger and resentment. He passionately hopes we are not hard wired for hate. Grant argues that it is time to leave identity behind and to embrace cosmopolitanism. *On Identity* is a meditation on hope and community.

## 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.

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## 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 scene was the most pivotal for the book? How do you think the story would have changed had that scene not taken place?
4. What scene resonated most with you personally in either a positive or negative way? Why?
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. What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?
7. How does the way the characters see themselves, differ from how others see them? How do you see the various characters?
8. How did the "roles" of the various characters influence their interactions? I.e. For a woman: Mother, daughter, sister, wife, lover, professional, etc.
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. Are there any books that you would compare this one to? How does this book hold up to them?
12. Have you read any other books by this author? Were they comparable to your level of enjoyment to this one?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## One-Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared

Jonas Jonasson

### About This Book

It all starts on the one-hundredth birthday of Allan Karlsson. Sitting quietly in his room in an old people's home, he is waiting for the party he-never-wanted-anyway to begin. The Mayor is going to be there. The press is going to be there. But, as it turns out, Allan is not... Slowly but surely Allan climbs out of his bedroom window, into the flowerbed (in his slippers) and makes his getaway. And so begins his picaresque and unlikely journey involving criminals, several murders, a suitcase full of cash, and incompetent police. As his escapades unfold, we learn something of Allan's earlier life in which – remarkably – he helped to make the atom bomb, became friends with American presidents, Russian tyrants, and Chinese leaders, and was a participant behind the scenes in many key events of the twentieth century.

### About The Author

After a long career as a journalist, media consultant and television producer, Jonas Jonasson decided to start a new life. He wrote a manuscript, he sold all his possessions in Sweden and moved to a small town by Lake Lugano in Switzerland, only a few meters from the Italian border. The manuscript became a novel. The novel became a phenomenon in Sweden, and now it is about to reach the rest of the world.

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## Discussion Questions

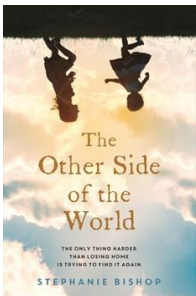


1. *Publishers Weekly* called this book, a "gentle lampoon of procedurals and thrillers." With a detective, a band of criminals and escapees on the run, it seems a valid description. Are these the terms in which you would talk about this novel? How else would you describe it?
2. What do you consider justice for Allan Karlsson?
3. Many readers have spoken about the humour and optimism of Allan Karlsson. How do these characteristics weave through the novel? What parts do you find particularly funny...and what makes them funny?
4. *The One Hundred Year Old Man* is a novel with the topic of ageing at its core. What are society's expectations of how the elderly should act? Talk about the ways—obvious and not-so-obvious—in which Allan defies the usual stereotypes. What are your own experiences, either as an older person yourself...or as someone who worries about an older friend or family member? Does society do a good job in terms of how we treat our older population? Have you read other novels that explore (and shatter) a strongly held societal belief?
5. History and politics sit lightly within the framework of this novel. When it comes to international relations, what worldview would you say the author seem to hold?
6. A definition of "satire" is "a literary composition in which vices, abuses and follies, etc are held up to scorn, derision or ridicule" (*Macquarie Dictionary*). Do you think this novel is a satire—and what is being satirized?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Other Side of the World**

**Stephanie Bishop**

## About This Book

In the tradition of Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work* or Maggie O'Farrell's *The Hand That First Held Mine* comes a complex, tender and gorgeously written novel of parenthood, love and marriage that is impossible to put down.

Cambridge 1963. Charlotte struggles to reconnect with the woman she was before children, and to find the time and energy to paint. Her husband, Henry, cannot face the thought of another English winter. A brochure slipped through the letterbox gives him the answer: 'Australia brings out the best in you'.

Charlotte is too worn out to resist, and before she knows it is travelling to the other side of the world. But on their arrival in Perth, the southern sun shines a harsh light on both Henry and Charlotte and slowly reveals that their new life is not the answer either was hoping for. Charlotte is left wondering if there is anywhere she belongs, and how far she'll go to find her way home...

## About The Author

The recent winner of the 2015 Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction, Stephanie Bishop's first novel was *The Singing*, for which she was named one of the Sydney Morning Herald's Best Young Australian Novelists. *The Singing* was also highly commended for the Kathleen Mitchell Award. *The Other Side of The World* is her second novel, and as well as winning the Readings Prize, it was shortlisted for the 2014 Australian/Vogel's Literary Award under the title *Dream England*. This book also saw Stephanie recently longlisted for the 2016 Stella Prize, shortlisted in the Victorian Premiers Literary Awards and shortlisted in the Indie Book Awards Best Fiction for 2015.

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## Discussion Questions

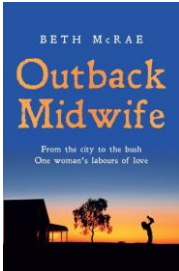
1. 'Is it easier to love a child, she wonders, than it is to love a wife?' How do you think Henry and Charlotte's relationship has been changed by the arrival of children? How might Charlotte's sense of failure as a mother have affected her relationship with Henry? Do you think the traditional demarcation of roles between mother and father is harmful or beneficial to a couple and their children?
2. 'In his mind he sees a kind of paradise: sunlight, blue sky, pineapple and steak, golf and tennis.' What do you think Australia represents today to immigrants? Do you think this reflects the truth of life in Australia?
3. 'So, where did you say you're from?' Do you think the experience of the non-European migrant is still different from that of the European migrant to Australia? In what ways?
4. Henry's ethnicity is never discussed directly between the couple. Why do you think this is? Do you think Charlotte has any understanding of Henry's experience as an Anglo-Indian in England, and then in Australia?
5. How much have attitudes towards race changed in Australia since the 1960s? How much of a role do you think immigration has played in this?
6. 'Nostalgia ... is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed' (Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*). Whether as migrants or just looking back over our lives, how clearly do we see past times and places? How does this affect our attitude towards the present? For what do you feel nostalgic?
7. 'How right that our experience should evolve and that our children's experience should move in ever wider circles than our own,' thinks Henry. How do you feel about this idea? Has this been your own and your family's experience?
8. Weather plays a key role in the book. Both Henry and Charlotte struggle with living in a climate different from the one in which they spent their childhood, and long for weather that feels familiar. How much do you think our experience of the weather affects our sense of belonging? How much do you think our climate 'setpoint' can be changed by later exposure to different environments? How important is living in a particular climate to you?
9. Workplace discrimination and bullying are today recognised as significant issues. What options do you think Henry had for responding to Collins's treatment of him in 1965? What would you have done in his place?
10. Imagine the life of Charlotte and Henry's children after the book ends. How do you think they turned out?
11. Think about your parents' involvement in your life. Focus on a decision they made that affected you and try to understand their reasoning.





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# Book Club Reading Notes



**Outback Midwife**

**Beth McRae**

## About This Book

*Outback Midwife* is the story of Beth McRae's 40 years as a midwife, from her terrifying first day witnessing a birth as a naïve student nurse to her training as a midwife – the days when the words 'birth plan' were unheard of and what women wanted was a long way from being part of any plan - to the outback.

Beth's career of catching babies takes her from the city to the bush, bonding with people from all walks of life at one of the most important moments in their lives. But there was one more frontier she was determined to conquer.

At a time when most people are thinking about slowing down, Beth decides to move to a remote Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land to embark on a whole other adventure.

## About the Author

Beth McRae began her training as a midwife at Preston and Northcote Community Hospital in Victoria, in the days when birth plans were unheard of, and went on 'catch babies' all over Australia.

After more than 30 years on the job, in her 50s there was one more frontier she was determined to conquer, the outback, where she believed her experience was needed more than anywhere else. So Beth upped sticks to a remote Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land and embarked on a whole new adventure.

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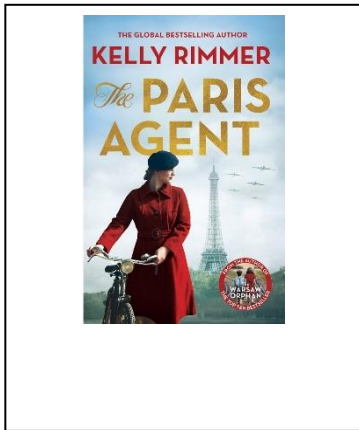
## Discussion Questions



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?
  - a. Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
  - b. 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?
  - c. 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?



# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Paris Agent

Kelly Rimmer

### About This Book

Twenty-five years after the end of the war, ageing British SOE operative Noah Ainsworth is reflecting on the secret agent who saved his life when a mission went wrong during his perilous, exhilarating years in occupied France. He never knew her real name, nor whether she survived the war. His daughter Charlotte begins a search for answers. What follows is the story of Fleur and Chloe, two otherwise ordinary women who in 1943 are called up by the SOE for deployment in France. Taking enormous risks with very little information or resources, the women have no idea they're at the mercy of a double agent within their ranks who's causing chaos. As Charlotte's search for answers continues, new suspicions are raised about the identity of the double agent, with unsettling clues pointing to her father.

### About The Author

Kelly Rimmer is the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and USA Today bestselling author of ten novels, including *The Secret Daughter* and *The Things We Cannot Say*. She's sold more than one million books, and her novels have been translated into more than 20 languages. Kelly lives in the Central West of New South Wales with her family and fantastically naughty dogs, Sully and Basil.

### Discussion Questions

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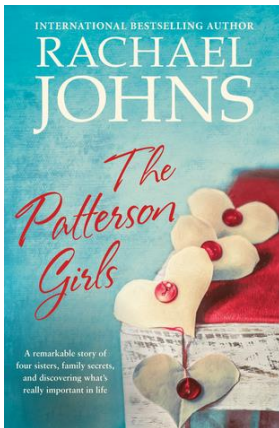
1. Kelly Rimmer has a strong track record of historical fiction novels set during World War II. How does "The Paris Agent" compare to her other works in terms of storytelling and themes?
2. The novel features three interwoven timelines. How did the multiple perspectives and timelines contribute to your understanding of the story? Did they enhance or challenge your reading experience?
3. The Paris Agent explores the work of Allied female spies in occupied France. What aspects of the spy network and their missions did you find most intriguing or compelling?
4. Each of the female protagonists—Charlotte, Fleur, and Chloe—plays a significant role in the story. Which character's storyline resonated with you the most, and why?
5. The book delves into the horrors of the Nazi occupation of France. How did the author's portrayal of this historical period impact your reading experience, and what aspects stood out to you?
6. Kelly Rimmer often incorporates family secrets and historical mysteries into her novels. How did the amnesia aspect in Charlotte's storyline affect your engagement with the book, and what did you think of the role of family secrets in the narrative?
7. Betrayal is a central theme in "The Paris Agent." Which character's actions and decisions related to betrayal had the most significant impact on the story, and how did you feel about their choices?
8. The story emphasizes the risks, sacrifices, and tragedy experienced by spies during World War II. Were there specific scenes or character moments that particularly moved or affected you?
9. The novel explores the concept of resilience. How do the female protagonists demonstrate resilience in their roles as spies, and how do their actions reflect the challenges they face in wartime France?
10. The Paris Agent is based on historical events and real-life individuals. How did this historical accuracy enhance your understanding of the story, and what were your thoughts on the author's approach to incorporating history into fiction?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Patterson Girls

Rachael Johns

### About This Book

How can four sisters build the futures they so desperately want, when the past is reaching out to claim them? When the Patterson daughters return home to Meadow Brook to be with their father after their mother's death, they bring with them a world of complication and trouble. The eldest sister, obstetrician Madeleine, would rather be anywhere but her hometown, violinist Abigail has fled from her stellar career, while teacher Lucinda is struggling to have the children she and her husband so desperately want. The black sheep of the family, Charlie, feels her life as a barista and exercise instructor doesn't measure up to that of her gifted and successful sisters. Dealing with their bereft father who is determined to sell the family motel, their loves old and new and a series of troublesome decisions doesn't make life any easier, but when they go through their mother's possessions and uncover the shocking secret of an old family curse, they begin to question everything they thought they knew. A warm and wise novel about secrets revealed, finding your soulmate and the unique bond between sisters.

### About The Author

In 2016 *The Patterson Girls* was named General Fiction Book of the Year at the Australian Book Industry Awards. Rachel has finished in a number of other competitions, including the Australian Romance readers Awards. *Jilted* won Favourite Australian Contemporary Romance for 2012, the *Patterson Girls* won the same award for 2015 and she was voted in the top Ten of Booktopia's Favourite Australian Author Poll in 2013. Rachel lives in the Perth Hills with her husband and three children.

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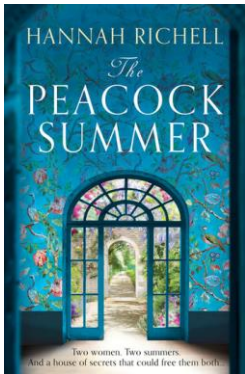
## Discussion Questions

1. Which of the four sisters did you most identify with? Why?
2. Which sister would you share a secret with?
3. Almost all the characters in *The Patterson Girls* are hiding some kind of secret. Why do you think they don't feel comfortable sharing with each other at the start?
4. Charlie often feels different, inferior, to her sisters. Do you think her feelings are valid or imagined? Does this happen often in families?
5. When Abigail embarks on an affair with Nigel she is an emotional wreck, how do you think she grows and changes throughout the novel? What does she learn about life and about herself?
6. What is your opinion on single women using donor sperm to have a child on their own? Do you think Madeleine's decision was well thought out?
7. If this book was a romance novel, which couple's falling-in-love story would you most like to read and why?
8. The men in the book have very different personalities and backgrounds. Who was your favourite: Hugo, Nigel, Joe or Mitch? Why?
9. What do you think would have happened to the family if the results of the paternity test were different?
10. Do you believe in curses? Have you any personal experience with them?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Peacock Summer

Hannah Richell

### About This Book

The Peacock Summer is a vivid tale stretching across 50 years. It tells the story of Lillian and her granddaughter Maggie, set against the intimidating backdrop of Cloudesley—a now dilapidated Children's manor house that in Lillian's youth and early days of marriage, was the setting for magnificent social events and soirées. Maggie is desperate to save the house from disrepair and uncovers a secret that not only reignites her own passion for art, but also rekindles her ailing Grandmother's memories of the summer of 1955.

### About The Author

Before Hannah became a writer, she worked in the publishing and film industries, marketing books and movies. Her first novel was *Secrets of the Tides*. This book was translated into 15 languages. Her second novel, *The Shadow Year* was published in 2013. Hannah has also written for a number of media outlets including *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Independent*, *Fairfax Media* and *Australian Women's Weekly*.

She currently resides in South West of England with her family.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What did you like most about this book? What did you like least?
2. Have you read any books that were similar to this one?
3. Would you be tempted to read another book by this author? Why or why not?
4. What feelings did this book invoke in you?
5. If you were able to ask the author of this book one question, what would it be?
6. Which was your favourite character and why?
7. What do you think of the book's title? If you were able to rename the book, what would it be?
8. What did you think of the pace of this book? Was it too fast, too slow or adequate?
9. Were you immediately able to become engaged in this story or was it difficult to get in to?
10. Was the setting unique or important to the telling of this story, or could the story have taken place anywhere?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The People on Platform 5**

**Clare Pooley**

## About This Book

Nobody ever talks to strangers on the train. It's a rule. But what would happen if they did? Every day Iona Iverson travels to work by train. Every day she sees the same people, making assumptions about them, and even giving them nicknames. But they never speak. Obviously. Then one morning, Smart-But-Sexist-Surbiton chokes on a grape right in front of Iona. Sanjay, a nurse, steps up to help and saves his life. This single event starts a chain reaction, and an eclectic group of people, with almost nothing in common except their commute, discover that talking to strangers on the train might be uncomfortable and awkward, but it can challenge all of their assumptions and prejudices, and could even transform their life.

## About The Author

Clare Pooley graduated from Newnham College, Cambridge and spent twenty years in the heady world of advertising. Clare's memoir - *The Sober Diaries* - has helped thousands of people around the world to quit drinking. *The Authenticity Project*, Clare's first novel, was a New York Times bestseller, a BBC Radio 2 book club pick, and winner of the RNA debut novel award.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Do you ever talk to strangers on public transportation? If not, why do you think that is? Which of the characters would you most—and least—like to share your commute with?
2. Each of the characters in the book make assumptions about one another, which often turn out to be wrong. What assumptions did you make about them, and who surprised you the most?
3. All the characters in the story are changed in some way, as a result of meeting one another. Who do you think are the most transformed?
4. Iona talks about having experienced sexism, ageism, and homophobia. We know that these factors work together to influence Iona's experience, but which one do you think appears to have an outsized impact on her life?
5. There are three married couples in the story: Iona and Bea, Piers and Candida, and David and Olivia. What does this story teach us about long-term relationships? Candida walks away from her marriage because she believes Piers changed the rules. Do you have any sympathy for her?
6. Do you agree with Iona's rules for commuting? What would your rules be?



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# Book Club Reading Notes



**Picnic at Hanging Rock**

**Joan Lindsay**

## About This Book

Everyone at Appleyard College for Young Ladies agreed it was just right for a picnic at Hanging Rock. After lunch, a group of three of the girls climbed into the blaze of the afternoon sun, pressing on through the scrub into the shadows of Hanging Rock. Further, higher, till at last they disappeared. They never returned. Whether Picnic at Hanging Rock is fact or fiction the reader must decide for themselves.

## About The Author

Joan Lindsay was born in Melbourne, where she went to school as a day-girl for a few years at Clyde Girls' Grammar, then situated in East St Kilda. She knew and loved the Macedon district from early childhood. In 1922 she married Sir Daryl Lindsay in London. The Lindsays travelled together in Europe and the USA, Daryl with his paints and Joan with her typewriter. Picnic at Hanging Rock (1967) is her best-remembered book and was filmed by Peter Weir in 1975. Sir Daryl died in 1976. Joan lived at their country home on the Mornington Peninsula, Mulberry Hill, Victoria until her death in December 1984.

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## Discussion Questions



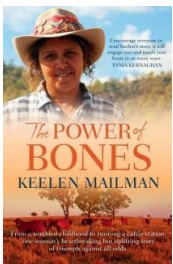
1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"?
2. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, inner qualities.
3. Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? Do they learn something about themselves and how the world works?
4. Is the plot engaging—does the story interest you?
5. Talk about the book's structure. Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints?
6. Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did—and
7. What difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?
8. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?
9. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character?
10. Is the ending satisfying?
11. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?
12. 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?





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# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Power of Bones**

**Keelen Mailman**

## About This Book

A heartbreaking tale of childhood poverty, abuse and racism that happily becomes an inspiring story of an extraordinary woman's strength through adversity. It looked bleak and predictable for little Keelen Mailman: an alcoholic mother, absent father, the horrors of regular sexual and physical assault and the casual racism of a small outback town in the sixties. But somehow, despite the pain and deprivation, the lost education, she managed to absorb her mother's lessons: her Bidjara language and culture, her obligations to Country, and her loyalty to her family. So it was no surprise to some that a girl, who could hide for a year in her own home to keep her family together, run as fast as Raylene Boyle and catch porcupine and goanna, would one day make history. At just 30, and a single mother, Keelen became the first Aboriginal woman to run a commercial cattle station when she took over Mt Tabor, two hours from Augathella on the black soil plains of western Queensland. This is the heartland of Bidjara country, after all, the place her mother and grandparents and great-grandparents had camped on and cared for, and where their ancestors left their marks on caves and rock walls more than 10,000 years ago. In this unflinching memoir, the warmth of Keelen's personality, her determination and her irresistible humour shine through as she recalls her extraordinary life.

## About The Author

Keelen Mailman was born in Augathella to a poor Aboriginal family with a history of alcoholism. Now she is the first female station manager for Mt Tabor, home to her native Bidjara people.

She is the author of two books on language, *Word Abuse: How the Words We Use Use Us* and *Mediaspeak: How Television Makes up Your Mind*. She is the coauthor of *Speaking of Words* and *Daddy's Little Girl*. The product of seven years of research and writing, *Pope Joan* is her first novel. She is now at work on a new novel set in 17th century France.

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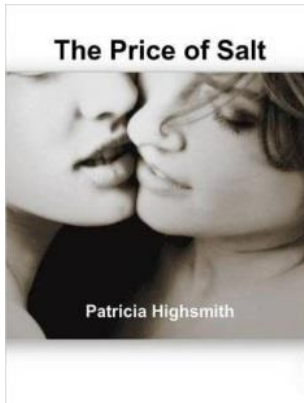
## Discussion Questions

1. “My heart is in this country. I am this country, and it is me.” Discuss Keelen’s relationship with the Australian landscape. What does the land give to her, and what does she give back?
2. Keelen’s mother offers the following advice to her children: ‘The more you experience, the more you learn’. In what ways does this apply to Keelen?
3. Discuss the personal significance of Keelen’s talent and passion for running, both as a child and as an adult. Why do you think it is so important for Keelen to confront the woman who denied her the chance to compete in the running championships?
4. What can readers learn from Keelen’s honest depiction of domestically violent relationships? How does she eventually break free from this cycle of abuse?
5. Discuss the importance of storytelling, both to Keelen personally and to her Indigenous culture?
6. The theme of survival is prevalent throughout the book. What sacrifices and choices is Keelen forced to make in order to carry on?
7. ‘Australia is the most beautiful country in the world to me, but I say it’s the most racist country in the world.’ Consider Keelen’s statement. Did Keelen’s story challenge your perception of racism in modern day Australia?
8. What does Keelen learn from her mother? How does Keelen apply her experiences to her own role as a mother caring for the many children in her life?
9. Discuss the significance of ‘The Spirits’ in guiding Keelen throughout her life.



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Price of Salt**

**Patricia Highsmith**

## About This Book

Arguably Patricia Highsmith's finest, *The Price of Salt* is story of Therese Belivet, a stage designer trapped in a department-store day job, whose salvation arrives one day in the form of Carol Aird, an alluring suburban housewife in the throes of a divorce. They fall in love and set out across the United States, pursued by a private investigator who eventually blackmails Carol into a choice between her daughter and her lover. With this reissue, *The Price of Salt* may finally be recognized as a major twentieth-century American novel.

## About The Author

Patricia Highsmith, an American novelist who is known mainly for her psychological crime thrillers which have led to more than two dozen film adaptations over the years. Her short story 'The Heroine' was published in the Harper's Bazaar magazine and it was selected as one of the 22 best stories that appeared in American magazines in 1945 and it won the O Henry award for short stories in 1946. Her first suspense novel 'Strangers on a Train' published in 1950 was an immediate success with public and critics alike. The novel has been adapted for the screen three times, most notably by Alfred Hitchcock in 1951. In 1955 her anti-hero Tom Ripley appeared in the splendid 'The Talented Mr Ripley', a book that was awarded the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière as the best foreign mystery novel translated into French in 1957. Ripley appeared again in 'Ripley under Ground' in 1970, in 'Ripley's Game' in 1974, 'The boy who Followed Ripley' in 1980 and in 'Ripley Under Water' in 1991. She wrote 22 novels and eight short story collections plus many other short stories, often macabre, satirical or tinged with black humour. She also wrote one novel, non-mystery, under the name Claire Morgan, plus a work of non-fiction 'Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction' and a co-written book of children's verse, 'Miranda the Panda Is on the Veranda'.

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## Discussion Questions

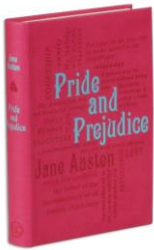
1. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
2. Whose story did you enjoy the most? Was there any character you wanted more insight into?
3. Were there any notable racial, cultural, traditions, gender, sexuality or socioeconomic factors at play in the book? If so, how did it affect the characters? Do you think they were realistically portrayed?
4. What surprised you the most about the book?
5. Were there any particular quotes that stood out to you? Why?
6. What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?
7. How does the way the characters see themselves, differ from how others see them? How do you see the various characters?
8. Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters? What would you have done differently?
9. How have the characters changed by the end of the book?
10. Are there any books that you would compare this one to? How does this book hold up to them?
11. Did your opinion of the book change as you read it? How?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen

## About This Book

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” So begins *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen’s witty comedy of manners—one of the most popular novels of all time—that features splendidly civilized sparring between the proud Mr. Darcy and the prejudiced Elizabeth Bennet as they play out their spirited courtship in a series of eighteenth-century drawing-room intrigues. Renowned literary critic and historian George Saintsbury in 1894 declared it the “most perfect, the most characteristic, the most eminently quintessential of its author’s works,” and Eudora Welty in the twentieth century described it as “irresistible and as nearly flawless as any fiction could be.”

## About The Author

Jane Austen was an English novelist whose works of romantic fiction, set among the landed gentry, earned her a place as one of the most widely read writers in English literature, her realism and biting social commentary cementing her historical importance among scholars and critics.

Austen lived her entire life as part of a close-knit family located on the lower fringes of the English landed gentry. She was educated primarily by her father and older brothers as well as through her own reading.

From 1811 until 1816, with the release of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815), she achieved success as a published writer. She wrote two additional novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, both published posthumously in 1818, and began a third, which was eventually titled *Sanditon*, but died before completing it.

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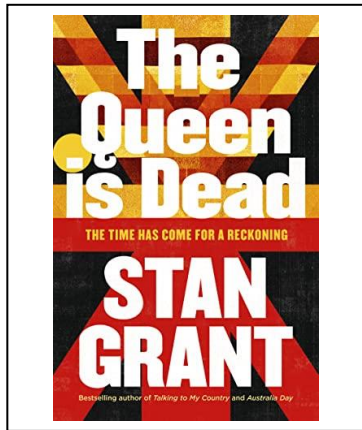
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## Discussion Questions

1. “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” This first line has become one of the most famous in English literature. In addition to setting the narrative in motion, how does this line alert us to the tone of the novel, and our role, as readers, in appreciating it? What does the line imply about women?
2. The book had the original, working title *First Impressions*. Why is *Pride and Prejudice* a better title? In what ways are Darcy and Elizabeth guilty of both pride and prejudice and how does this drive the action of the story?
3. Marriage, as something to be aspired to, is portrayed quite differently in the novel than existing marriages. What married couples do we see in the novel? How would you characterize these relationships?
4. How are Elizabeth’s wit and intelligence and independence first made clear in the novel? In what ways, during the course of the novel, is she the victim of her own intellect and independence? Are these features eventually responsible for her happy ending?
5. The love Elizabeth feels toward Mr. Darcy evolves and deepens largely without direct contact. Does that make you question that love? What causes these feelings of love? Are they realistic?
6. Why is Darcy so attracted to Elizabeth? When can we first sense this? Why does it take her so long to see it? Elizabeth’s attraction to Darcy arises very differently. Why is this important?
7. For much of the novel, Austen seems to be offering a fairly pointed critique of marrying for social considerations. But it’s also true that the happy marriages that bring the novel to a close are favorable by the terms of the society. In the end, both Elizabeth and Jane do marry “up.” Does this undermine the critique the book offers? Is it meant to be read ironically? Do you think that Austen is critiquing Elizabeth and Jane?
8. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that many Austen fans read and reread. What keeps readers returning to the book once the suspense of whether or not Darcy and Elizabeth will end up together is taken away?
9. The works of Jane Austen have been the inspiration of numerous contemporary books and films, both adaptations and new original works. What universal themes in the novel resonate today?
10. The happy union between Darcy and Elizabeth is ultimately (and unwittingly) assured by Lady Catherine. How? Why is this master stroke of dramatic irony so satisfying for readers? Can you see how the roots of this irony are sown throughout the novel?
11. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel largely about love and relationships, but without any descriptions of passion. Do you think the novel’s chasteness is more a reflection of the way people lived in that time and place or a reflection of what was acceptable in its literature or something specific to Jane Austen? Is the novel strengthened by this constraint?



# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Queen is Dead**

**Stan Grant**

## About This Book

The Queen reigned for seventy years. She came to the throne at the height of Empire and died with the world at a tipping point. What comes next after the death of what Stan Grant calls 'the last white Queen'? From one of our most respected and award-winning journalists, Stan Grant, *The Queen is Dead* is a searing, viscerally powerful, emotionally unstoppable, pull-no-punches book on the bitter legacy of colonialism for indigenous people. Taking us on a journey through the world's fault lines, from the war in Ukraine, the rise of China, the identity wars, the resurgence of white supremacy, and the demand that Black Lives Matter, *The Queen is Dead* is a full-throated, impassioned argument on the necessity for an end to monarchy in Australia, the need for a Republic, and what needs to be done - through the Voice to Parliament and beyond - to address and redress the pain and sorrow and humiliations of the past.

## About The Author

Stan Grant, born on September 30, 1963, is an Australian journalist, writer, and presenter of Wiradjuri heritage. With over 30 years in broadcast media, he has worked for networks like Seven, SBS, and CNN International. Grant's career highlights include winning the Logie Award in 1994 and launching SBS' National Indigenous Television in 2012. He joined ABC in 2017, holding roles such as editor of Indigenous Affairs and hosting programs like *Matter of Fact*. Grant's academia journey led to a professorship at Griffith University and the Vice-Chancellor's Chair at Charles Sturt University, emphasizing his commitment to Indigenous issues.

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## Discussion Questions

1. How does Stan Grant's personal experiences and identity as an Indigenous person influence the themes and perspectives explored in "The Queen is Dead"?
2. In what ways does Grant use the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the ascendance of King Charles III as a lens to examine the history of empire, colonialism, and race-based orders?
3. How does Grant argue for a global reckoning with the race-based order that underlies empire and colonialism in the aftermath of Queen Elizabeth II's 70-year rule?
4. Explore Grant's examination of liberalism and democracy, arguing that they have descended into tyranny and terror. How does this perspective shape his critique of the modern world?
5. Discuss the significance of Grant's engagement with Western philosophers and conservative thinkers to explain the crisis of liberalism and democracy. How does this intellectual exploration connect with his lived experiences?
6. How does Grant navigate the challenges of discussing the monarchy's legacy and the impact of colonization, considering the reactions and attacks he faced in the media?
7. In the final section of the book, Grant focuses on themes of "love," friendships, family, and Country. How does this shift in focus contribute to the overall narrative and message of the book?
8. Explore the intersection of big ideas in history, such as the Enlightenment, modernity, and democracy, with Grant's personal identity and experiences. How does he bridge these two realms in his writing?
9. Discuss Grant's perspective on the unexamined public discourse in Australia surrounding the death of Queen Elizabeth II, especially in the context of global economic and cultural shifts.
10. Reflect on the theme of racism as a persistent feature of the modern world, as highlighted by Grant's decision to step away from the public stage. How does this impact the space for Indigenous public intellectuals, and what does it reveal about the broader societal challenges?

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# Book Club Reading Notes



**Reckoning**

**Magda Szubanski**

## About This Book

Heartbreaking, joyous, traumatic, intimate and revelatory, *Reckoning* is the book where Magda Szubanski, one of Australia's most beloved performers, tells her story. In this extraordinary memoir, Magda describes her journey of self-discovery from a suburban childhood, haunted by the demons of her father's espionage activities in wartime Poland and by her secret awareness of her sexuality, to the complex dramas of adulthood and her need to find out the truth about herself and her family. With courage and compassion she addresses her own frailties and fears, and asks the big questions about life, about the shadows we inherit and the gifts we pass on. Honest, poignant, utterly captivating, *Reckoning* announces the arrival of a fearless writer and natural storyteller. It will touch the lives of its readers.

## About The Author

Magda Szubanski is one of Australia's best known and most loved performers. She began her career in university revues, then appeared in a number of sketch comedy shows before creating the iconic character of Sharon Strzelecki in ABC-TV's *Kath and Kim*. She has also acted in films (*Babe*, *Babe: Pig in the City*, *Happy Feet*, *The Golden Compass*) and stage shows. *Reckoning* is her first book.

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## Discussion Questions

1. How does the Magda Szubanski revealed in this memoir match with her public persona?
2. Through all the trauma and emotional difficulties, did you find moments of humour in *Reckoning*?
3. Ultimately, Szubanski realises she is a paradoxical mix of both her parents: 'my Irish talking-paralysis on the one side and my Polish romantic impulsiveness on the other.' Are we inevitably a product of our parents? What is your take on the nature versus nurture debate?
4. More specifically, how does trauma get passed down from parents to their children? As Szubanski asks, 'Can it be that some dim memory of trauma is carried in our genes?'
5. Is 'the stone of madness' a metaphor or something more literal?
6. After passing the entrance exam to a new school, Szubanski is 'crushed by the feeling that I was just an extension of (my father), there to live his unlived dream. More than that. I was there to live Poland's unlived dreams... My life and achievements were not my own'. What do we owe our parents? Do children of parents who have suffered owe them more? Is rebellion against our parents inevitable?
7. Inherited trauma and depression have been as much part of Szubanski's life as comedy and acting. How are these different sides of her linked?
8. Do you think this memoir is an exercise of self-exploration, or is it trying to communicate something broader about the world?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Rose Code

Kate Quinn

### About This Book

1940, Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire. Three very different women are recruited to the mysterious Bletchley Park, where the best minds in Britain train to break German military codes. Vivacious debutante Osla has the dashing Prince Philip of Greece sending her roses – but she burns to prove herself as more than a society girl, working to translate decoded enemy secrets. Self-made Mab masters the legendary codebreaking machines as she conceals old wounds and the poverty of her East-End London upbringing. And shy local girl Beth is the outsider who trains as one of the Park's few female cryptanalysts. 1947, London. Seven years after they first meet, on the eve of the royal wedding between Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip, disaster threatens. Osla, Mab and Beth are estranged, their friendship torn apart by secrets and betrayal. Yet now they must race against the clock to crack one final code together, before it's too late, for them and for their country.

### 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", "The Huntress," "The Rose Code," and "The Diamond Eye." All have been translated into multiple languages. Kate and her husband now live in San Diego with three rescue dogs.

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## Discussion Questions

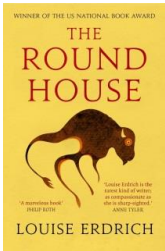
1. Why was working as a codebreaker the right path for Osla, Mab and Beth? What did each woman hope to achieve at Bletchley Park?
2. We see the trio become good friends but in 1947—they are enemies. Why do you think the author decided to tell the story in the two timelines? Did it impact how you read about the friendship in the early '40s?
3. Each woman experiences a romance during their time at Bletchley Park. For Osla, it's a romance with Prince Phillip. Do you think it would have lasted longer if Osla could have told him about her work? Or were they always fated just to be friends?
4. Mab's romance with Francis is sweet but then tragic. The author spends a lot of time talking about Francis' PTSD from fighting in WW1—why was it important for the author to include those sections about the harsh realities of war?
5. And Beth begins a relationship with the married Harry. What drew them together?
6. We eventually learn the true nature of the betrayal. Both Francis and Mab's daughter is tragically killed in a bomb strike. Mab blames Osla for not holding more tightly to her daughter and eventually they all find out that Beth knew that attack would happen. Let's talk in detail about this betrayal.
7. Beth believes she made the right call because she couldn't sacrifice her oath. Do you believe she was in the wrong? What would you have done if you were Beth?
8. Throughout the novel, we know there was a traitor at Bletchley Park. Who did you originally think it was? Were you surprised it was Giles?
9. What did you think about the ending?
10. The Rose Code will be made in a TV series. Who do you think should play the main parts? What do you hope is included in the show and also expanded upon?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Round House**

**Louise Erdrich**

## About This Book

One Sunday in the spring of 1988, a woman living on a reservation in North Dakota is attacked. The details of the crime are slow to surface as Geraldine Coutts is traumatized and reluctant to relive or reveal what happened, either to the police or to her husband, Bazil, and thirteen-year-old son, Joe. In one day, Joe's life is irrevocably transformed. He tries to heal his mother, but she will not leave her bed and slips into an abyss of solitude. Increasingly alone, Joe finds himself thrust prematurely into an adult world for which he is ill prepared.

While his father, who is a tribal judge, endeavours to wrest justice from a situation that defies his efforts, Joe becomes frustrated with the official investigation and sets out with his trusted friends, Cappy, Zack, and Angus, to get some answers of his own. Their quest takes them first to the Round House, a sacred space and place of worship for the Ojibwe. And this is only the beginning.

## About The Author

Karen Louise Erdrich is an American author of novels, poetry, and children's books. Her father is German American and mother is half Ojibwe and half French American. She is an enrolled member of the Anishinaabe nation (also known as Chippewa). She is widely acclaimed as one of the most significant Native writers of the second wave of what critic Kenneth Lincoln has called the Native American Renaissance.

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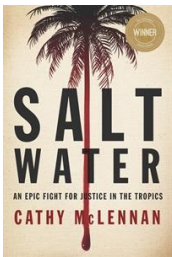
## Discussion Questions

1. *The Round House* opens with the sentence: "Small trees had attacked my parents' house at the foundation." How do these words relate to the complete story that unfolds?
2. Though he is older as he narrates the story, Joe is just thirteen when the novel opens. What is the significance of his age? How does that impact the events that occur and his actions and reactions?
3. Describe Joe's family and his relationship with his parents. In talking about his parents, Joe says, "I saw myself as different, though I didn't know how yet." Why, at thirteen, did he think this? Do you think the grown-up Joe narrating the story still believes this?
4. Joe's whole family is rocked by the attack on his mother. How does it affect the relationship between his mother and father, and between him and his mother? Does it alter Joe's view of them? Can trauma force a child to grow up "overnight"? What impact does it have on Joe? How does it transform his family?
5. "My mother's job was to know everybody's secrets," Joe tells us. How does this knowledge empower Geraldine and how does it make her life more difficult?
6. After the attack, Joe's mother, Geraldine, isn't sure exactly where it happened, whether it was technically on Reservation land or not. How does the legal relationship between the U.S. and the Ojibwe complicate the investigation? Why can't she lie to make it easier?
7. He also tells Joe about the different types of evil—the material version, which we cannot control, and the moral one, which is harm deliberately caused by humans. How does this knowledge influence Joe?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Saltwater**

**Cathy McLennan**

## About This Book

Everyone knows that some of those kids are innocent ... your dilemma is not whether the kids are innocent, but which of the kids are innocent.' When Cathy McLennan first steps into Townsville's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service as a young graduate she isn't expecting a major murder case to land on her desk. The accused are four teenage boys whose family connections stretch across the water to Palm Island. As she battles to prove herself in the courtroom, Cathy realises that the truth is far more complex than she first thought. She starts to question who are the criminals and who are the victims. *Saltwater* tells the compelling story of one lawyer's fight for justice amongst the beauty and the violence of this tropical paradise.

## About The Author

Cathy McLennan is the winner of the 2014 Queensland Literary Award for Best Emerging Author and has written for the Courier Mail and the Townsville Bulletin. She has more than twenty years' experience in criminal law, from her early days working as a barrister for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service in North Queensland, to appearing in the High Court and deciding cases as a Queensland Magistrate. She has a Masters of Law and was the recipient of the 2015 Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Alumnus of James Cook University. Cathy is well known for her dedication to vulnerable Queenslanders. She lives with her husband and their two children.

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## Discussion Questions

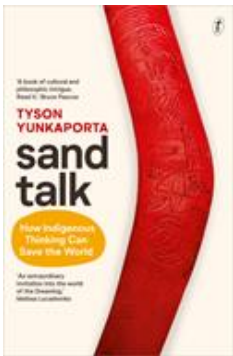
1. If your book offers a cultural portrait—of life in another country or region of your own country, start with questions a, b, and c ... What observations are made in the book?
2. Does the author examine economics and politics, family traditions, the arts, religious beliefs, language or food?
3. Does 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?
4. What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand?
5. 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
6. Do the issues affect your life? How so - directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. What solutions does the author propose? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?
11. 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?
12. Talk about specific passages that struck you as significant—or interesting, profound, amusing, illuminating, disturbing, sad...? What was memorable?
13. 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



**Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World**

**Tyson Yunkaporta**

## About This Book

This remarkable book is about everything from echidnas to evolution, cosmology to cooking, sex and science and spirits to Schrödinger's cat.

Tyson Yunkaporta looks at global systems from an Indigenous perspective. He asks how contemporary life diverges from the pattern of creation. How does this affect us? How can we do things differently?

Sand Talk provides a template for living. It's about how lines and symbols and shapes can help us make sense of the world. It's about how we learn and how we remember. It's about talking to everybody and listening carefully. It's about finding different ways to look at things.

## About The Author

Tyson Yunkaporta is an academic, an arts critic, and a researcher who belongs to the Apalech Clan in far north Queensland. He carves traditional tools and weapons and also works as a senior lecturer in Indigenous Knowledges at Deakin University in Melbourne.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on the Indigenous idea that 'If you don't move with the land, the land will move you'. If we had to redesign Australia's infrastructure according to this principle, what might this more mobile and adaptive society look like?

Chapter 1, The Porcupine, the Paleo-mind and the Grand Design

2. This chapter introduces the idea of finding the most creative solutions in the most marginal of viewpoints. Can you think of any examples in which dialogue with an unlikely outsider has produced startling innovation?

Chapter 2, Albino Boy

3. Different models of physics in different cultures result in diverse experiences of time and space. Could this possibly be true, or are the laws of physics culturally neutral and universal?

Chapter 3, First Law

4. In this chapter we alter the symbolic colours and shapes of the Aboriginal flag (red for land/resources/environment, black for people/community/society, yellow circle for spirit/values/law) to represent different political and economic systems. Using this model, how would you represent China's economic system?

Chapter 4, Forever Ltd

5. Imagine that the official pre-history of harsh, brutal, primitive cultures is inaccurate and that Palaeolithic lifestyles were in fact characterised by abundance and a rich intellectual culture. Imagine what your own ancestors would have been like in this scenario, then imagine what you would be like if you were raised in that culture. How would you be different?

Chapter 8, Romancing the Stone Age

9. What are the most essential kinds of data and knowledge that might be 'backed up' off-grid through oral culture methods within intergenerational relationships grounded in local landscapes? How could this be done?

Chapter 9, Displaced Apostrophes

10. This chapter cautions against the assumption that every word out of an Indigenous person's mouth is wisdom. So how can you tell if somebody is sharing important knowledge with you, or just being silly? And what is the right way to respond in both situations?

Chapter 10, Lemonade for Headaches

11. Modern civilisation offers a very narrow range of sexualities within hetero-normative and homonormative frameworks of being in physical relation to each other. Can you imagine what kinds of sexual experience may have existed before these limiting categories came into being?

Chapter 11, Duck Hunting is Everybody's Business



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Secret Life of Shirley Sullivan

Lisa Ireland

### About This Book

'An endearing novel about one gutsy, smart and inspirational woman. I want to be Shirley when I grow up.' Rachael Johns

'Elderly. Is that how the world sees me? A helpless little old lady? If only they knew. I allow myself a small smirk.'

When Shirley Sullivan signs her 83-year-old husband, Frank, out of the Sunset Lodge Nursing Home, she has no intention of bringing him back.

For fifty-seven years the couple has shared love, happiness and heartbreak. And while Frank may not know who his wife is these days, he knows he wants to go home. Back to the beach where they met in the early 1960s . . .

So, Shirley enacts an elaborate plan to evade the authorities – and their furious daughter, Fiona – to give Frank the holiday he had always dreamed of.

And, in doing so, perhaps Shirley can make amends for a lifelong guilty secret.

### About the Author

Lisa Ireland is an Australian writer of contemporary women's fiction. After working for many years as a primary school teacher, Lisa is now a full-time writer.

Her novel, *Feels Like Home*, is an Australian Bestseller. In 2015 Lisa was one of the Top Ten Debut Fiction Authors in Australia. She has six books published to date.

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## Discussion Questions

1. 'Elderly. Is that how the world sees me? A helpless little old lady? If only they knew. I allow myself a small smirk.' Shirley uses her 'little old lady' persona to her advantage. She understands that people will underestimate her abilities due to her age and she plays on this. Do you think as a society we stereotype people as they age? If so, what are the consequences of this?
2. Despite her age, Shirley is depicted as a woman who learns quickly and copes well with modern technology. Do you think this is realistic? Do you know anyone like Shirley?
3. Even though Shirley acknowledges Sunset Lodge is a good aged-care facility she does not think it is suitable for Frank. Is she right?
4. Shirley and her daughter have a fractious relationship. Why do you think Fiona is so hostile towards her mother?
5. Why do you think Fiona chose an aged-care facility for her father? Do you have any sympathy for her decision?
6. Shirley takes Frank on the road trip he is always dreamed of. If you had the opportunity to take off in a Kombi where would you go?
7. Fiona worries about the amount of time Lou spends online and sees her as a social misfit, whereas Shirley sees another side of her granddaughter. When Lou manages to galvanise her online community, The Sherbies, to provide practical aid to her runaway grandparents, Shirley is proud of Lou's popularity and success within the group. Do you think online communities can provide real social benefits? Have you ever had an online association that has evolved into a real-life friendship?
8. When Shirley meets Rita, her world opens. Her friendship with Rita and their subsequent love affair allows Shirley to become her authentic self. Given this, why does Shirley stay with Frank, especially once Fiona leaves home?
9. Do you think she made the right decision?
10. Rita is completely comfortable in her own skin and makes no apology for her sexuality, but she is forced to keep her relationship with Shirley a secret. Shirley's inability to fully commit eventually causes friction in their relationship. Why does Rita stay?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Secret Lives of Men**

**Georgia Blain**

## About This Book

In these haunting stories, Georgia Blain explores human nature in all its richness: our motivations, our desires and our shortcomings. The men in these tales frequently linger at the edges — their longings and failures exerting a subterranean pull on the women in their lives. In 'The Secret Lives of Men', a woman revisits her hometown and learns a long-held secret about her first boyfriend. In 'The Bad Dog Park', a man's devotion to his pet ultimately forces him to confront his true hopes and fears. And in 'The Other Side of the River', a snap decision has devastating consequences for a mother and her family. Written in Blain's trademark unadorned yet powerful prose, these stories resonate long after they are finished.

## About The Author

Georgia Blain has published novels for adults and young adults, essays, short stories, and a memoir. Her first novel was the bestselling *Closed for Winter*, which was made into a feature film. She was shortlisted for numerous awards including the NSW and SA Premiers' Literary Awards, and the Nita B. Kibble Award for her memoir *Births Deaths Marriages*. Georgia's works include *The Secret Lives of Men*, *Too Close to Home*, and the YA novel *Darkwater*. In 2016, in addition to *Between a Wolf and a Dog*, Georgia also published the YA novel *Special*. She lived in Sydney, where she worked full-time as a writer.

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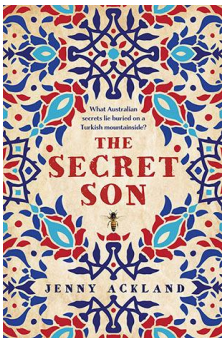
## Discussion Questions

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. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, inner qualities.
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. Talk about the book's structure. Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories? Does the time-line move forward chronologically...or back and forth between past and present? Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints? Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did—and what difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?
6. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?
7. 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?
8. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?
9. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?
10. 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?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Secret Son**

**Jenny Ackland**

## About This Book

An old woman sits waiting in a village that clings to a Turkish mountainside, where the women weave rugs, make tea and keep blood secrets that span generations. Berna can see what others cannot, so her secrets are deeper and darker than most. It is time for her to tell her story, even though the man for whom her words are meant won't hear them. It is time for the truth to be told. Nearly a hundred years before, her father James had come to the village on the back of a donkey, gravely ill, rescued from the abandoned trenches of Gallipoli by a Turkish boy whose life he had earlier spared. James made his life there, never returning to Australia and never realising that his father was indeed the near-mythical bushranger that the gossips had hinted at when he'd been a boy growing up in Beechworth. Now, as Berna waits, a young man from Melbourne approaches to visit his parents' village, against the vehement opposition of his cursed, tight-lipped grandfather. What is the astonishing story behind the dark deeds that connect the two men, unknown to each other and living almost a century apart?

## About The Author

Jenny Ackland was born in Melbourne and has a background in primary teaching. She has worked in too many offices but only one themed restaurant; sold textbooks in a university bookshop; taught special education and English as a Foreign Language in Australia and overseas; and worked as a proofreader on magazines and freelance editor on technical publications. Now, she teaches sexuality and relationships education in primary and secondary schools. She's been blogging since 2005, and her short fiction has been listed in prestigious literary prizes and awards, such as the Bridport and Fish Prizes, as well as published in various literary magazines, including *Visible Ink*, *The Big Issue*, *Kill Your Darlings* and the *Sleepers Almanac*. She has travelled widely, and has spent several years living in Turkey and Japan, but now lives in Melbourne with her husband and their three teenaged children. *The Secret Son* is her debut novel.

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## Discussion Questions

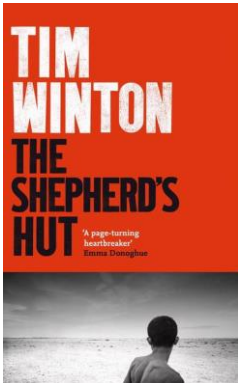
1. “The first and most important thing a man must do is identify his quest. The second thing he has to do is complete it.” (pg. 103) Consider and compare the varying journeys of the characters in *The Secret Son*. Do you agree with Ibrahim’s idea of what constitutes a fulfilling life?
2. Consider the unlikely friendships formed between James and Ferhat; Cem and Harry. What do these characters learn from their companions?
3. *The Secret Son* explores the lives of women in two very different societies. How does the book portray the rights and roles of women? And how do the female characters challenge these constructs?
4. Consider the parallel journeys of James and Cem. In what ways are they similar? And how are they different?
5. Discuss the power of storytelling throughout the book. How does the act of listening to and telling stories help the characters gain a greater understanding of the world and themselves?
6. Discuss Cem’s attitudes towards women throughout the book. How are they changed and challenged by his experiences and interactions with the female characters in the book?
7. How does the revelation about his father change James’s understanding of himself? How does looking back help him move forward?
8. ‘What is it you know absolutely?’ Throughout the book this question is asked repeatedly of the characters. How important is the idea of truth to the characters? What place is there for faith and mystery?
9. ‘The souls of men are not as dark as we like to believe.... There’s always a context for a life lived.’ (p. 245) Consider this statement by Linda. How do the characters grapple with the idea of being a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ person? Is it ever that simple?
10. How does *The Secret Son* challenge the idea of truth in history? What role can fiction play in shaping our understanding of the past?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Shepherd's Hut

By Tim Winton

### About This Book

Jaxie dreads going home. His mum's dead. The old man bashes him without mercy, and he wishes he was an orphan. But no one's ever told Jaxie Clackton to be careful about what he wishes for. In one terrible moment his life is stripped to little more than what he can carry and how he can keep himself alive. There's just one person left in the world who understands him and what he still dares to hope for. But to reach her he'll have to cross the vast Saltlands on a trek that only a dreamer or a fugitive would attempt. *The Shepherd's Hut* is a searing look at what it takes to keep love and hope alive in a parched and brutal world.

### About The Author

Tim Winton has published twenty-nine books for adults and children, and his work has been translated into twenty-eight languages. Since his first novel, *An Open Swimmer*, won the Australian Vogel Award in 1981, he has won the Miles Franklin Award four times (for *Shallows*, *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and *Breath*) and twice been shortlisted for the Booker Prize (for *The Riders* and *Dirt Music*). He lives in Western Australia.

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## Discussion Questions



1. Fintan and Jaxie are both outcasts. They're from different generations, different cultures, different circumstances, but in your opinion, how alike are they?
2. To what extent is Jaxie a reliable narrator?
3. Fintan could be seen as a kind of modern-day transportee – an Irishman banished to Australia for his crime. What's your view of him, and of his punishment? What kind of a role model is he?
4. Jaxie has a complicated relationship with language. How important is language in this novel?
5. Once he's fled Monkton, Jaxie's immediate challenge is survival. What do you consider these to be?
6. While Jaxie says he doesn't believe in praying, he suspects it's something everyone does in one way or another, either out of instinct or superstition. Do you agree with him?
7. Jaxie has always been at home in the bush, but in what ways does he see it differently through Fintan?
8. Is Jaxie a defender of decency, as he claims, or just a murderer? A battered boy with a heart of gold or a sociopath?
9. On page 49 Jaxie comments that he's a roller of the dice. Consider the role played in this story, by quirks of fate/gambling/risk taking.

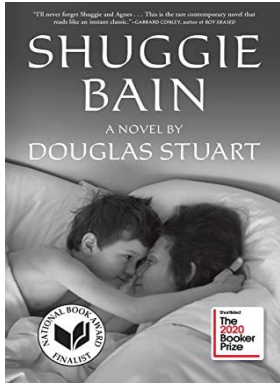


Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes

**Shuggie Bain**

**Douglas Stuart**



## About This Book

*Shuggie Bain* is the unforgettable story of young Hugh "Shuggie" Bain, a sweet and lonely boy who spends his 1980s childhood in run-down public housing in Glasgow, Scotland. Thatcher's policies have put husbands and sons out of work, and the city's notorious drugs epidemic is waiting in the wings. Shuggie's mother Agnes walks a wayward path: she is Shuggie's guiding light but a burden for him and his siblings.

A heartbreaking story of addiction, sexuality, and love, *Shuggie Bain* is an epic portrayal of a working-class family that is rarely seen in fiction. Recalling the work of Edouard Louis, Alan Hollinghurst, Frank McCourt, and Hanya Yanagihara, it is a blistering debut by a brilliant novelist who has a powerful and important story to tell.

## About The Author

Douglas Stuart is a Scottish - American author. His debut novel, 'Shuggie Bain,' is the winner of the 2020 Booker Prize.

His next novel 'Young Mungo' will publish April 2022.

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## Discussion Questions

1. If there is a villain in the story, who is it and why?
2. Alcoholism is a complex disease, so it is completely wrong to try and blame one person for Agnes' demise. Despite this, as you read the text did you feel that any one person let Agnes down more than others?
3. Agnes always takes pride in her appearance and values good manners. Maintaining her dignity is important to her, yet she frequently fails to do so. Discuss how you feel about Agnes both as a mother, wife, and woman.
4. Do you blame Catherine for leaving her family, marrying young and emigrating to South Africa?
5. What aspects of Shuggie Bain did you find the most shocking to read?
6. Shuggie is a soft boy by the other characters in the book. They judge him by 1980s Glaswegian standards of masculinity. How would you describe Shuggie?
7. Shuggie has two female friends in the book. Discuss the impact that both girls have on Shuggie?
8. What was the single most shocking incident in the Douglas Stuart's Shuggie Bain?
9. How could Agnes have been 'saved'?
10. Which character in Shuggie Bain do you have most empathy for and why?
11. Shuggie Bain is about working-class people surviving in a world of poverty and deprivation. Who do you think the likely readership of Shuggie Bain will be? Have a conversation about this.





# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Sound and the Fury**

**William Faulkner**

## About This Book

The Sound and the Fury is the tragedy of the Compson family, featuring some of the most memorable characters in literature: beautiful, rebellious Caddy; the manchild Benjy; haunted, neurotic Quentin; Jason, the brutal cynic; and Dilsey, their black servant. Their lives fragmented and harrowed by history and legacy, the character's voices and actions mesh to create what is arguably Faulkner's masterpiece and one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century.

## About The Author

William Cuthbert Faulkner was a Nobel Prize-winning American novelist and short story writer. One of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, his reputation is based mostly on his novels, novellas, and short stories. He was also a published poet and an occasional screenwriter.

The majority of his works are based in his native state of Mississippi. Though his work was published as early as 1919, and largely during the 1920s and 1930s, Faulkner was relatively unknown until receiving the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature, "for his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel." Faulkner has often been cited as one of the most important writers in the history of American literature. Faulkner was influenced by the European modernism, and employed the Stream of consciousness in several of his novels.

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## Discussion Questions

1. The novel's title is taken from a monologue spoken by Shakespeare's Macbeth, he says:

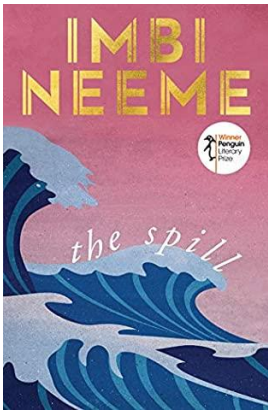
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

2. Why do you think Faulkner chose a phrase from this passage for his title? How is this passage applicable to the novel?
3. Do you find the novel as pessimistic and despairing as Macbeth's speech?
4. In *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner makes use of the stream of consciousness technique, which was also used earlier in the 1920s in such experimental works as James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. How do you learn to find your way in Benjy's chapter? How many time periods are interspersed?
5. What are some of the events Benjy is remembering? If Benjy is the "idiot" of Macbeth's speech, in what ways can he be seen, nonetheless, as both a sensitive and sentient observer of his family?
6. Which characters, if any, serve as registers of emotional and moral value? In whom do we find love, honour, loyalty, strength?
7. What role does Dilsey play in the novel? Why does the narrative of the fourth and final section focus upon her, and why do you think Faulkner chose not to give her a narrative in her own voice?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Spill**

**Imbi Neeme**

## About This Book

In 1982, a car overturns on a remote West Australian road. Nobody is hurt, but the impact is felt for decades.

Nicole and Samantha Cooper both remember the summer day when their mother, Tina, lost control of their car – but not in quite the same way. It is only after Tina's death, almost four decades later, that the sisters are forced to reckon with the repercussions of the crash. Nicole, after years of aimless drifting, has finally found love, and yet cannot quite commit. And Samantha is hiding something that might just tear apart the life she has worked so hard to build for herself.

*The Spill* explores the cycles of love, loss and regret that can follow a family through the years – moments of joy, things left unsaid, and things misremembered. Above all, it is a deeply moving portrait of two sisters falling apart and finding a way to fit back together.

## About the Author

Imbi Neeme is a recovering blogger, impending novelist and compulsive short story writer. Her manuscript *The Spill* was awarded the 2019 Penguin Literary Prize. She was also the recipient of the 2019 Henry Handel Richardson Fellowship at Varuna for excellence in Short Story Writing.

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## Discussion Questions

1. The author uses a non-linear chronology to represent pieces of the narrative puzzle falling into place – withholding pieces of information until characters are ready to digest them. What did you think of this choice?
2. Sisters are a regular motif in fiction. Why do you think that is? Nicole and Samantha's relationship is at the heart of the novel. How does it change over time and why do you think that is?
3. Samantha may be read as not easy to love. In what ways do you think her behaviour is influenced by, or even directed by, her upbringing, genetics, her current situation or the secrets she is keeping?
4. What do you think about the idea of 'difficult' characters in general? Is it essential that a character be 'likeable'?
5. The Spill explores themes of trust, betrayal, loyalty and what constitutes a family. Which of these themes stood out to you the most and why?
6. The characters keep many secrets from each other. Do you think this is to protect themselves or the people around them?
7. Discuss how far people should go to shield their loved ones from the truth.
8. On reading The Spill, writer Robert Lukins said, 'These are people, like us, making lives of their messes.' What do you think of this summation of the book?
9. Share your thoughts about the book's final revelation. Why do you think Tina never told Nicole or Samantha (or Craig or Meg) that she knew about Craig and Meg?
10. What do you think about the fact that they will never know?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Spy and the Traitor**

**Ben Macintyre**

## About This Book

If anyone could be considered a Russian counterpart to the infamous British double-agent Kim Philby, it was Oleg Gordievsky. The son of two KGB agents and the product of the best Soviet institutions, the savvy, sophisticated Gordievsky grew to see his nation's communism as both criminal and philistine. He took his first posting for Russian intelligence in 1968 and eventually became the Soviet Union's top man in London, but from 1973 on he was secretly working for MI6.

## About The Author

Ben Macintyre is a writer-at-large for The Times (U.K.) and the bestselling author of *The Spy and the Traitor*, *A Spy Among Friends*, *Double Cross*, *Operation Mincemeat*, *Agent Zigzag*, and *Rogue Heroes*, among other books. Macintyre has also written and presented BBC documentaries of his work.

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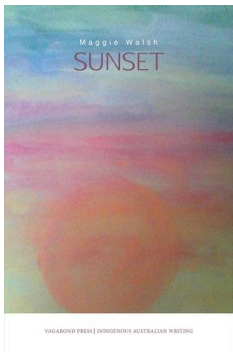
## Discussion Questions

1. Were you immediately engaged with the book, or did it take you a while?
2. Does the book remind you of any other books or writers?
3. Who is your favourite character?
4. Describe the main characters personality traits?
5. How has the past shaped their lives?
6. Do you admire or disapprove of them?
7. Do they remind you of people you know?
8. Is the story interesting?
9. Is the story plot driven?
10. Is the book a "page turner" or does it unfold slowly?
11. Is there a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Sunset**

**Maggie Walsh**

## About This Book

The poems that make up *Sunset* are not complex poems. Most of them are written in a simple style, many as ballads with regular end rhymes and repetition. The imagery is very crisp, mostly situated around the natural world. No matter how regular the rhythms, Walsh's poems have a very light touch, at times creating a Haiku-like or imagist feel, allowing the images to function in the place of meaning.

## About The Author

Maggie Walsh is a Bwcolgamon woman from Palm Island. As she has spent a lot of her childhood years in the Dormitory, Walsh is still finding her family connections. Maggie was born in Townsville in 1964.

She has read her poetry at various events and festivals over the years including NAIDOC in Townsville, WIPCE Conference at Rod Laver Arena Melbourne, the Queensland Poetry Festival, Sydney Writers' Festival, and the Palm Island Spring Festival.

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## Discussion Questions

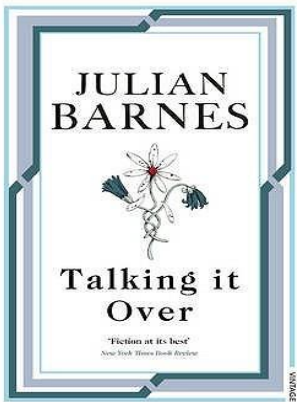
1. What did you like most about this book? What did you like least?
2. Have you read any books that were similar to this one?
3. Would you be tempted to read another book by this author? Why or why not?
4. What feelings did this book invoke in you?
5. If you were able to ask the author of this book one question, what would it be?
6. Which was your favourite poem and why? Which was your least favourite?
7. What do you think of the book's title? If you were able to rename the book, what would it be?
8. What did you think of the style of poems?
9. Were you immediately able to become engaged in this book?
10. Did you like the imagery used in these poems? Was it realistic?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Talking it Over**

**Julian Barnes**

## About This Book

From the winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize for Fiction comes a novel of profound insight and comic flare. Shy, sensible banker Stuart has trouble with women; that is, until a fortuitous singles night, where he meets Gillian, a picture restorer recovering from a destructive affair. Stuart's best friend Oliver is his complete opposite - a language teacher who 'talks like a dictionary', brash and feckless. Soon Stuart and Gillian are married, but it is not long before a tentative friendship between the three evolves into something far different. *Talking it Over* is a brilliant and intimate account of love's vicissitudes. It begins as a comedy of errors, then slowly darkens and deepens, drawing us compellingly into the quagmires of the heart.

## About The Author

Julian Patrick Barnes is a contemporary English writer of postmodernism in literature. He has been shortlisted three times for the Man Booker Prize--- Flaubert's Parrot (1984), England, England (1998), and Arthur & George (2005), and won the prize for *The Sense of an Ending* (2011). He has written crime fiction under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh. Following an education at the City of London School and Merton College, Oxford, he worked as a lexicographer for the Oxford English Dictionary. Subsequently, he worked as a literary editor and film critic. He now writes full-time. His brother, Jonathan Barnes, is a philosopher specialized in Ancient Philosophy. He lived in London with his wife, the literary agent Pat Kavanagh, until her death on 20 October 2008.

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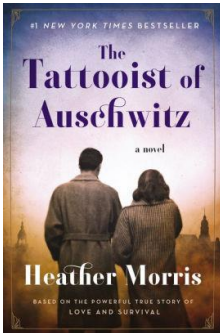
## Discussion Questions

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



## The Tattooist of Auschwitz

Heather Morris

### About This Book

In April 1942, Lale Sokolov, a Slovakian Jew, is forcibly transported to the concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau. When his captors discover that he speaks several languages, he is put to work as a Tätowierer (the German word for tattooist), tasked with permanently marking his fellow prisoners.

Whilst being imprisoned for over two and a half years, Lale witnessed horrific atrocities and barbarism - but also incredible acts of bravery and compassion.

### About The Author

Heather Morris was born in New Zealand, but is now a resident in Australia. For several years, while working in a large public hospital in Melbourne, she studied and wrote screenplays, one of which was optioned by an Academy Award-winning screenwriter in the US.

In 2003 Heather met Lale Sokolov. As their friendship grew, he embarked on a journey of self-scrutiny and entrusted the innermost details of his life during the Holocaust to her. Heather originally wrote Lale's story as a screenplay before reshaping it into her debut novel, The Tattooist of Auschwitz.

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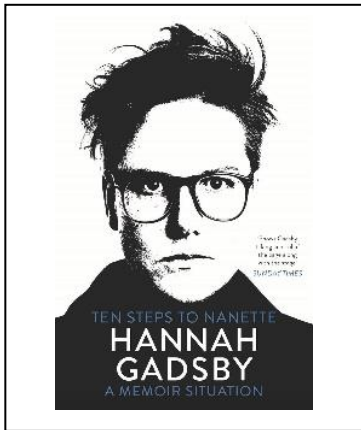
## Discussion Questions

1. Have you read any books that were similar to this one? How were they similar, and how were they different?
2. Which characters in this book could you most relate to? Why?
3. What emotions did this book evoke in you?
4. How did you find the book's length? Was it adequate, too short or too long?
5. What did you already know about this topic before reading it?
6. Would you recommend this book to others? Why or why not?
7. Did the book's pace seem too fast, too slow, or adequate?
8. How did you find the book's ending? Were you left satisfied?
9. What did you like most about this book? What did you like least?





# Book Club Reading Notes



## Ten Steps to Nanette: A Memoir Situation

Hannah Gadsby

### About This Book

The memoir from Australia's much-loved comedian, Hannah Gadsby, whose stand-up show and self-described swan-song, Nanette, played to sold-out houses in Australia, the UK and the US. Its launch on Netflix, and subsequent Emmy and Peabody wins, took Nanette (and Hannah) to the world. Multi-awardwinning Hannah Gadsby transformed comedy with her show Nanette, even as she declared that she was quitting stand-up. Now, she takes us through the defining moments in her life that led to the creation of Nanette and her powerful decision to tell the truth-no matter the cost.

### About The Author

Hannah Gadsby, an acclaimed Australian comedian, blends quick wit with deliberate pacing. Surviving numerous accidents, she adds a bionic touch to her sardonic and laconic style. Known for droll delivery and self-deprecating humor, she's a regular on TV, including ABC's "Adam Hills Tonight" and Josh Thomas' "Please Like Me." Utilizing her art history degree, Gadsby presents comedic art lectures and documentaries, like "Hannah Gadsby's Nakedy Nudes." Her stand-up swan song, "Nanette," garnered awards globally, addressing poignant themes. The show's success led to international performances and a Netflix special recorded at the Sydney Opera House, showcasing Gadsby's undeniable comedic prowess.

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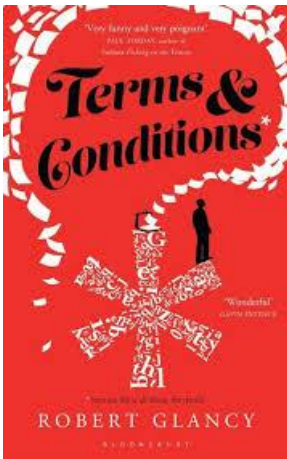
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## Discussion Questions

1. How does the opening scene at Eva Longoria's Garden party set the tone for Hannah Gadsby's memoir, *Ten Steps to Nanette*?
2. In what ways does Gadsby's global success with *Nanette* and Douglas contribute to the transformation of her world, as mentioned in the book review?
3. Explore Gadsby's journey to understand her own biology, starting from her conservative hometown in north-west Tasmania. How does she navigate self-loathing and confusion related to her sexuality and neurodiversity?
4. Discuss the impact of Gadsby's diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and ADHD on her understanding of herself. How does the diagnosis provide her with a more solid foundation and freedom?
5. How does Gadsby address the lack of awareness about women having autism in the popular conversation, especially during her childhood and teen years?
6. Examine the role of the memoir in explaining how Gadsby's autism functions, from the calming effect of the colour blue to the sensory pleasure derived from the clink of a teacup. How does art history help her make sense of the world?
7. Explore Gadsby's statement about beginning at "not normal" and moving off from there. How does this perspective impact her approach to life and her identity?
8. Discuss the challenges Gadsby faces as an autistic person in a sometimes-hostile world, particularly in negotiating and communicating. How does she navigate these challenges with painful clarity?
9. Explore the theme of aesthetic and its importance to Gadsby's mental health, as mentioned in the book review. How does she perceive the world differently in terms of safety and nurturing environments?
10. Reflect on Gadsby's suggestion that if people on the spectrum designed physical spaces, there would be less rage. How does this statement provide insights into the experiences and perspectives of individuals with autism?



# Book Club Reading Notes



Terms and Conditions

Robert Glancy

## About This Book

Frank has been in a serious car accident and he's missing memories—of the people around him, of the history they share, and of how he came to be in the crash. All he remembers is that he is a lawyer who specialises in fine print, and as he narrates his story, he applies this expertise in the form of footnotes.

Alice, Frank's wife, isn't at all like the woman he fell in love with. She's written a book called Executive X that makes Frank furious, though he isn't sure why. And to make matters even stranger, stored in a closet is a severed finger floating in an old mustard jar that makes him feel very, very proud.

As more memories flood in, Frank's tightly regulated life begins to unspool as he is forced to face up to the real terms and the condition of his life.

## About The Author

Robert Glancy was born in Zambia and raised in Malawi. At fourteen he moved from Africa to Edinburgh then went on to study history at Cambridge. He currently lives in New Zealand with his wife and children.

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## Discussion Questions

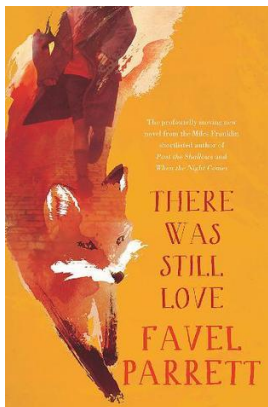
1. How did you experience the book? Were you pulled effortlessly into the book...or did you have difficulty getting into it? Why? Did you find yourself amused, intrigued, enthralled, disturbed, fearful, irritated, angered, or impatient?
2. Which characters do you admire or dislike and why? What are their 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



**There was still Love**

**Favel Parrett**

## About This Book

There Was Still Love relates the story of twin sisters separated at fifteen by the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia and then kept apart by the Cold War. It is the 1980s and they are each raising a grandchild, Liska in Melbourne and Ludek in Prague. Much of the story is told through the eyes of the children.

## About the Author

Favel Parrett is a writer based in Victoria, Australia. In 2011, Favel Parrett's career was launched with her critically acclaimed debut *Past the Shallows*. A heart-breaking novel, it was sold internationally, shortlisted in the prestigious Miles Franklin Award and won the Dobbie Literary Award

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## Discussion Questions

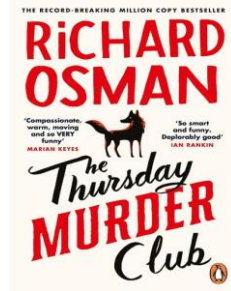


1. Have any of your views or thoughts changed after reading this book?
2. Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters?
3. What would you have done differently in their circumstance?
4. What past influences are shaping the actions of the people in the story?
5. Are there any books that you would compare this one to? How does this book hold up to them?
6. Have you read any other books by this author?
7. Were they comparable to your level of enjoyment to this one?
8. What did you learn from, take away from, or get out of this book?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



The Thursday Murder Club

Richard Osman

## About This Book

Kate Atkinson called *THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB* “a little beacon of pleasure,” and she couldn’t be more right. It’s that and much, much more.

An eclectic group of retired residents at Coopers Chase village meet every Thursday to try their hand at solving old murders. Sometimes it starts with a mysterious note slipped under a door. Or sometimes Elizabeth, one of the members and an enigmatic woman who won’t take no for an answer, unearths a cold case file. However, it happens, Elizabeth, Joyce, Ibrahim, and Ron all leap in to try to solve the mystery. They have fabulous fun doing so and prefer it to yoga or jigsaw puzzles.

## About The Author

Richard Osman is an author, producer, and television presenter. His first novel, *THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB*, was a #1 million-copy international bestseller. He lives in London.

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## Discussion Questions

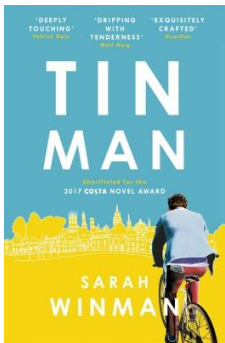
1. Who do you like best: Joyce, Elizabeth, Ibrahim or Ron? Why?
2. Joyce was a nurse, Elizabeth was in the secret service, Ibrahim was a psychiatrist and Ron was a trade union leader. Who do you think was most helpful in solving the crime?
3. Did you think that PC Donna De Freitas and DCI Chris Hudson made a good team? What did one bring that the other lacked, and vice versa?
4. Joyce says 'I am very happy to be overlooked and always have been. And I do think perhaps that will be helpful in this investigation.' Do you agree?
5. As Val McDermid said, at the heart of this book is a 'warning never to underestimate the elderly'. Who misjudges the residents of Cooper's Chase the most?
6. Who did you think the killer was? What made you think it was them?
7. One of the recurring themes is the grey area between the law and each character's moral code. Do you think Penny's husband, John, did the right thing? How about Penny?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Tin Man**

**Sarah Winman**

## About This Book

This is almost a love story.

Ellis and Michael are twelve when they first become friends, and for a long time it is just the two of them, cycling the streets of Oxford, teaching themselves how to swim, discovering poetry, and dodging the fists of an overbearing father. And then one day this closest of friendships grows into something more.

## About The Author

Sarah Winman was born in 1964 in Essex, England. Her debut novel *One Child at a Time* is a story about childhood, eccentricity, the darker side of love and sex, the pull and power of family ties, loss and life and love and became a best seller.

Sarah's second novel, *A Year of Marvellous Ways* was published in 2015 and is about the relationship between the eighty-nine year old Marvellous, and Drake, a young soldier left reeling by the Second World War.

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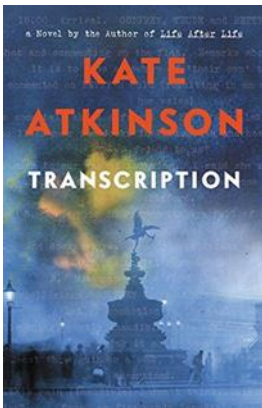
## Discussion Questions

1. After turning the final page, why do you think the novel is entitled Tin Man?
2. The colour yellow is a repeating motif in this novel. Discuss its significance.
3. What does the book have to say about the distinction between friendship and romantic love?
4. What message does the novel send about grief and loss?
5. 'I see our reflection in the restaurant window. We are a Still Life.' Discuss the significance of art in Tin Man.
6. How does Annie connect with both Ellis and Michael? How did you see her role in the trio?
7. Tin Man has been praised for its spare but beautiful use of prose. Are there any lines that stood out for you?
8. Did you see a resemblance between Dora and Annie? What does this say about family in the novel?
9. 'Men and boys should be capable of beautiful things. Never forget that.' What does the novel have to say about gender, especially in relation to masculinity?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Transcription**

**Kate Atkinson**

## About This Book

During WWII, Juliet Armstrong was conscripted into service as a young woman, transcribing conversations between an MI5 agent and a ring of suspected German sympathizers. Years later, in 1950 post-war London, Julie can't escape the repercussions of her work for the government, and is pulled back into the life of espionage she thought she'd left behind.

## About The Author

Kate Atkinson was born in York and now lives in Edinburgh. Her first novel, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award and she has been a critically acclaimed international bestselling author ever since.

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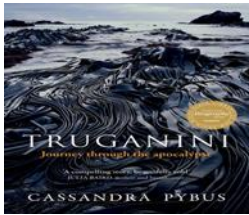
1. The story starts off in 1981 and jumps back to 1940 and then moves to 1950 for a good chunk before finishing back in the '80s. What did you think about this story structure and different time periods when it comes to story flow?
2. Let's evaluate Juliet in the time different time periods and how she grew and evolved. What surprised you the most about her?
3. Which story lines were you most engaged with and why?
4. Why do you think Juliet lied so much in her interview with Morton? Why do you think they hired her?
5. Let's talk about Juliet's dynamic with Perry. She obviously was in lust with him while he had other interests in mind, however, he still cared for her just not in the way she wanted. How did this showcase her naivety?
6. And on the other hand, Juliet is very capable with her transcribing skills and is asked to go undercover. Why do you think Juliet was so skilled at being undercover?
7. Now let's focus on Godfrey, a complicated figure in many ways. He's a spy but he seems fond of the British Fascist sympathizers, despite their beliefs. Why? What does that represent about human nature?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Truganini**

**Cassandra Pybus**

## About This Book

Cassandra Pybus's ancestors told a story of an old Aboriginal woman who would wander across their farm on Bruny Island, in south-east Tasmania, in the 1850s and 1860s. As a child, Cassandra didn't know this woman was Truganini, and that Truganini was walking over the country of her clan, the Nuenonne.

For nearly seven decades, Truganini lived through a psychological and cultural shift more extreme than we can imagine. But her life was much more than a regrettable tragedy. Now Cassandra has examined the original eyewitness accounts to write Truganini's extraordinary story in full.

## About The Author

Cassandra Pybus is an award-winning author and a distinguished historian. She is author of twelve books and has held research professorships at the University of Sydney, Georgetown University in Washington DC, the University of Texas, and King's College London. She is descended from the colonist who received the largest free land grant on Truganini's traditional country of Bruny Island.

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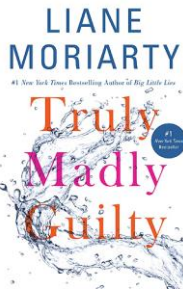
## Discussion Questions

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



**Truly, Madly, Guilty**

**Liane Moriarty**

## About This Book

Sam and Clementine have a wonderful, albeit, busy life: they have two little girls, Sam has just started a new dream job, and Clementine, a cellist, is busy preparing for the audition of a lifetime. If there's anything they can count on, it's each other. Clementine and Erika are each other's oldest friends. A single look between them can convey an entire conversation. But theirs is a complicated relationship, so when Erika mentions a last minute invitation to a barbecue with her neighbors, Tiffany and Vid, Clementine and Sam don't hesitate. Having Tiffany and Vid's larger than life personalities there will be a welcome respite. Two months later, it won't stop raining, and Clementine and Sam can't stop asking themselves the question: What if we hadn't gone?

## About The Author

Liane Moriarty is the Australian author of six internationally best-selling novels, *Three Wishes*, *The Last Anniversary*, *What Alice Forgot*, *The Hypnotist's Love Story* and the number 1 New York Times bestsellers, *The Husband's Secret* and *Big Little Lies*. Her breakout novel *The Husband's Secret* sold over three million copies worldwide, was a number 1 UK bestseller, an Amazon Best Book of 2013 and has been translated into over 40 languages. It spent over a year on the New York Times bestseller list. CBS Films has acquired the film rights. With the launch of *Big Little Lies*, Liane became the first Australian author to have a novel debut at number one on the New York Times bestseller list. An HBO series based on *Big Little Lies* is currently in production, starring Nicole Kidman and Reese Witherspoon. Writing as L.M. Moriarty, Liane has also written a children's book series, *The Petrifying Problem with Princess Petronella*, *The Shocking Trouble on the Planet of Shobble* and *The Wicked War on the Planet of Whimsy*. Liane lives in Sydney with her husband, son and daughter. Her new novel, *Truly Madly Guilty*, will be released in July 2016.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the novel's title. Why do all of the characters feel so guilty? Should they? How do they deal with their guilt?
2. The epigraph is a Claude Debussy quote: "Music is the silence between the notes." What does that mean to you? How significant are silences and the unsaid in this novel?
3. Erika's psychologist tells her, "You've got to get this idea out of your head about there being some objective measure of normality. ...This 'normal' person of whom you speak doesn't exist!" Do you agree? Do you think this relates back to Tolstoy's famous quote, "Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way"? Is the real normal that, once you scratch the surface, no family is normal?
4. What does Clementine mean when she thinks back on the "extraordinary ordinariness" of her life before the barbecue? How is the ordinary treated in this novel? Do you think it's inevitable that we don't appreciate the ordinary? Do we need a life event as jarring as what happened to Sam and Clementine in order to fully appreciate our lives?
5. What did you make of Erika's request that Clementine donate her eggs? Were you surprised by Clementine's response? Erika tells Oliver: "We did save Ruby's life. That's a fact. Why shouldn't they repay us by doing something in return? And what does it matter what her motivations are?" Do you agree that in this case "the ends justify the means"?
6. In this novel, parenting is not always easy and wonderful: "No one warned you that having children reduced you right down to some smaller, rudimentary, primitive version of yourself, where your talents and your education and your achievements meant nothing." What do you think? How do the various mothers and fathers balance family and career?
7. Money and class are knotty issues in this novel. Vid's relationship with wealth seems to be very straightforward: "He had the money. He could afford the best. So he'd buy the best and take pleasure in it." Tiffany's, though, is more complicated. Why do you think that is? What role do you think gender plays in this difference, if at all?
8. Discuss this description of Sam and Clementine: "First-world medical care meant they didn't have to pay for their first-world negligence." What is the relationship between status and guilt for the characters?
9. Sam and Clementine can't understand why they are so affected by the barbecue: "They weren't fighting over money or sex or housework. There were no knotty issues to untangle. Everything was the same as before the barbecue. It was just that nothing felt the same." What do they mean by that? How does life change for the three families after the barbecue? Do you think they are ultimately strengthened by what they went through?





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# Book Club Reading Notes



**Untamed**

**Glennon Doyle**

## About This Book

*In her most revealing and powerful memoir yet, the beloved activist, speaker, and bestselling author of *Love Warrior* and *Carry On, Warrior* explores the joy and peace we discover when we stop striving to meet the expectations of the world and start trusting the voice deep within us.*

This is how you find yourself.

There is a voice of longing inside each woman. We strive so mightily to be good: good partners, daughters, mothers, employees, and friends.

## About The Author

Glennon Doyle (formerly Doyle Melton) is a *New York Times* bestselling author of *Untamed* (2020), *Love Warrior* (2016), and *Carry On, Warrior* (2012). She is an activist, philanthropist, and the creator of the online community Momastery. She is also president of Together Rising, a non-profit that has raised more than four million dollars for women and children in crisis.

Doyle was born in Burke, Virginia, and comes from a close family that includes one sister, Amanda Doyle. She completed her B.A. at James Madison University in 1998 and became a teacher in Northern Virginia. During her time at James Madison University.

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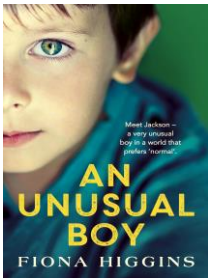
## Discussion Questions

1. A standout quote includes: “When a woman finally learns that pleasing the world is impossible, she becomes free to learn how to please herself.” Let’s talk about what this quote means to us.
2. Glennon talks often about embracing one’s Knowing. Let’s discuss what this Knowing is and how it applies to each person.
3. She talks about God and religion throughout the book and says, “to me, faith is not a public allegiance to a set of outer beliefs, but a private surrender to the inner Knowing.” What do you think about her viewpoint on God and religion?
4. In the chapter where her mother is struggling with Glennon’s sexuality, Glennon recognizes that while her mother loves her, they disagree about what’s best for her. So Glennon is going to have to decide who she trusts more: her mother or herself. And for the first time, she decided to trust herself and that’s when she became an adult. She says that a woman becomes a responsible parent when she stops being an obedient daughter. What do you think about this concept, and can you relate to it?
5. The book is positioned as insight about what it means to be a woman today. Do you agree that the book achieved this?
6. What are your key takeaways from this book?
7. Which quotes and passages did you highlight from the book?



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# Book Club Reading Notes



**An Unusual Boy**

**Fiona Higgins**

## About This Book

Meet Jackson – a very unusual boy in a world that prefers “normal”.

Julia Curtis is a busy mother of three, with a husband frequently away for work, an ever-present mother-in-law, a career, and a house that needs doing up. Her fourteen-year-old daughter, Milla, has fallen in love for the first time, and her youngest, Ruby, is a nine-year-old fashionista who can out-negotiate anyone. But Julia’s eleven-year-old son, Jackson, is different. Different to his sisters and classmates. In fact, Jackson is different from everyone. And bringing up a child who is different isn’t always easy. Then, one Monday morning, Jackson follows his new friend Digby into the school toilets. What happens inside changes everything, not only for Jackson, but for every member of his family. Julia faces the fight of her life to save her unusual boy from a world set up for ‘normal’. *An Unusual Boy* is a heart-stopping, devastating, but ultimately uplifting story about loyalty, love and forgiveness.

## About The Author

Most of my life, writing has been my preferred medium for reflecting on life’s complexities, conundrums and unanswered questions. I’ve been writing since the age of nine, but only managed publication from the age of 35 – which goes some way to prove that you *can* teach an old dog, new tricks

When I’m not writing, I’m active in the Australian philanthropic sector and work with families, charities and boards to respond to pressing social issues. I like to stay active, and often get up stupidly early to go running, ocean-swimming or cycling in the bush.

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## Discussion Questions

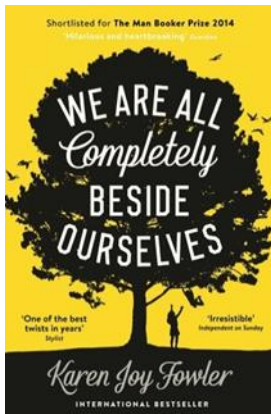
1. Did this book keep you interested or was it a slow burn?
2. Did reading this book impact your mood or opinion?
3. Did this book leave you with questions? If so, what questions?
4. What emotions did this book make you feel?
5. What was your favourite part and least favourite part of this book?
6. Would you read another book by this author?
7. Would you consider Jackson unusual?
8. Did this book meet your expectations?
9. Did this book remind you of any other titles?
10. What three words would you use to describe this book?





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# Book Club Reading Notes



## We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

Karen Joy Fowler

### About This Book

Meet the Cooke family. Our narrator is Rosemary Cooke. As a child, she never stopped talking; as a young woman, she has wrapped herself in silence: the silence of intentional forgetting, of protective cover. Something happened, something so awful she has buried it in the recesses of her mind.

Now her adored older brother is a fugitive, wanted by the FBI for domestic terrorism. And her once lively mother is a shell of her former self, her clever and imperious father now a distant, brooding man.

And Fern, Rosemary's beloved sister, her accomplice in all their childhood mischief? Fern's is a fate the family, in all their innocence, could never have imagined.

### About The Author

Karen Joy Fowler is the author of six novels and three short story collections. *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2014, won the PEN/Faulkner Prize and has sold over half a million copies.

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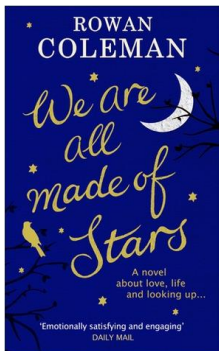
## Discussion Questions

1. “Start in the middle,” Rosemary’s father says at the beginning of the book. How does the order that Rosemary tells her story affect how we get to know her?
2. It’s not until page 77 that we discover Rosemary’s sister Fern is a chimpanzee. Rosemary’s keen to control the way the reader is introduced to certain ideas, in this case so that she can establish Fern as her sister and not an animal. Did that work for you?
3. There are hints to Fern’s true nature in the book before you’re told: did you sense there was something different about her?
4. “An oft-told story is like a photograph in an album; eventually, it replaces the moment it was meant to capture.” How we experience the past is central to the book. Rosemary’s memories of her childhood are sometimes sharp, and sometimes cloudy. Many of her memories rely on her senses. And often we are aware that how she remembers experiencing something isn’t necessarily the way it actually happened. How true to your own experience does the presentation of memory seem?
5. Rosemary says more than once that unfairness bothers children and chimps greatly. Do you agree?
6. Many people will have known that Fern is a chimpanzee before beginning the book. Some people say this makes it more compelling, others wish they hadn’t known. There is a study that suggests that knowing the end – or the middle – of a plot doesn’t actually decrease our enjoyment of it. What do you think, does knowing a plot detail spoil the story or enhance it?
7. Does the ending mean Rosemary has atoned for her earlier sins? Did she need to?
8. “It’s hard to overstate how lonely I was. Let me just repeat that I’d once gone, in a matter of days, from a childhood where I was never alone to this prolonged, silent only-ness.” When Rosemary meets Harlow, she finds her fascinating, despite knowing intuitively that she’s untrustworthy. What is it about Harlow that Rosemary finds so irresistible?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**We are all made of Stars**

**Rowan Coleman**

## **About This Book**

Stella Carey has good reason to only work nights at the hospice where she is a nurse. Married to a war veteran who has returned from Afghanistan brutally injured, Stella leaves the house each night as her husband Vincent, locks himself away, unable to sleep due to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

During her nights at the hospice, Stella writes letters for her patients containing their final wishes, thoughts and feelings – from how to use a washing machine, to advice on how to be a good parent – and usually she delivers each letter to the recipient after he or she has died. That is until Stella writes one letter that she feels compelled to deliver in time to give her patient one final chance of redemption.

## **About The Author**

Rowan Coleman is the author of fourteen novels including The Sunday Times bestseller The Memory Book, the double award-winning Runaway Wife and the New York Times and Sunday Times bestseller The Accidental Mother.

When she gets the chance, Rowan enjoys sleeping, sitting and loves watching films; she is also attempting to learn how to bake.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Who was your favourite character and why?
2. How was this book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices such as flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story?
3. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable and realistic?
4. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot?
5. What were some of the major themes of the book? Did the author effectively develop these themes?
6. Were you glad that you read this book? Would you recommend it to someone else to read ?
7. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them?
8. What events in the story stand out for you as memorable?
9. Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## We Used To Be Kings

By Stewart Foster

### About This Book

Six years ago Tom's brother died. The next day he came back. It's Tom and Jack's 18th birthday, but it isn't a cause for celebration. For the past three years they've been in a care home for troubled children, a place where Dr Smith tries to silence the voice of Jack in Tom's head. But Tom doesn't want that. He's already lost his brother once; he's not going to lose him again. And so, when they go in front of the review board, they will have to pretend Jack has gone so they won't be sent to the Young Men's Institution or they'll have to escape. Because one way or another they've got to get out of this place. They've got to be free; they've got to remember everything that happened to them, to their mum, and to their dad. They have to find their dad, whom they haven't seen since he left on a space mission to the moon when they were young. *We Used to Be Kings* is the story of a young boy's descent into madness following the loss of everything he knows. Set in the 1970s, it is reminiscent of unusually hot summers, pictures of Russians in space and war on our doorstep. It's an audacious, at times hilarious story that is ultimately heartbreaking and unforgettable.

### About The Author

Stewart Foster was born in Bath, England His debut novel *We Used to Be Kings*, is available in the UK and France. His second novel, (YA) is *The Bubble Boy*, which will be released by Simon and Schuster in May 2016.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the structure and style of the writing?
2. Whose story did you enjoy the most? Was there any character you wanted more insight into?
3. Were there any notable racial, cultural, traditions, gender, sexuality or socioeconomic factors at play in the book? If so, how did it affect the characters? Do you think they were realistically portrayed?
4. What surprised you the most about the book?
5. Were there any particular quotes that stood out to you? Why?
6. What were the dynamics of "power" between the characters? How did that play a factor in their interactions?
7. How does the way the characters see themselves, differ from how others see them? How do you see the various characters?
8. Were there any moments where you disagreed with the choices of any of the characters? What would you have done differently?
9. How have the characters changed by the end of the book?
10. Are there any books that you would compare this one to? How does this book hold up to them?
11. Did your opinion of the book change as you read it? How?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Weekend**

**Charlotte Wood**

## About This Book

Three women in their seventies reunite for one last, life-changing weekend in the beach house of their late friend. Four older women have a lifelong friendship of the best kind: loving, practical, frank, and steadfast. But when Sylvie dies, the ground shifts dangerously for the remaining three. They are Jude, a once-famous restaurateur; Wendy, an acclaimed public intellectual; and Adele, a renowned actress now mostly out of work. Struggling to recall exactly why they have remained close all these years, the grieving women gather at Sylvie's old beach house--not for festivities this time, but to clean it out before it is sold. Can they survive together without her? Without Sylvie to maintain the group's delicate equilibrium, frustrations build, and painful memories press in. Fraying tempers, an elderly dog, unwelcome guests and too much wine collide in a storm that brings long-buried hurts to the surface--and threatens to sweep away their friendship for good. *The Weekend* explores growing old and growing up, and what happens when we're forced to uncover the lies, we tell ourselves.

## About the Author

Wood was born in Cooma, New South Wales. She is the author of six novels – *Pieces of a Girl* (1999), *The Submerged Cathedral* (2004), *The Children* (2007), *Animal People* (2011), *The Natural Way of Things* (2015) and *'The Weekend'* (2019). She has also written a collection of interviews with Australian writers, *The Writer's Room* (2016), a collection of personal reflections on cooking, *Love & Hunger* (2012). She was also editor of an anthology of writing about siblings, *Brothers & Sisters* (2009).

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## Discussion Questions

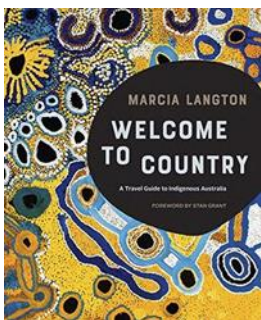
1. Our first impression of Sylvie—through the collective memories of Jude, Wendy and Adele—is as the peacemaker of the group. As we learn more about the four women, does your opinion of Sylvie change? Why or why not?
2. In addition to the loss of Sylvie, each character is experiencing personal and professional setbacks. Do you think this exacerbates the conflict between them?
3. One of the few shared traits Jude, Wendy and Adele possess is how their identity is strongly defined by their career. Why do you think this remains important to them?
4. Jude, Wendy and Adele's positive and negative opinions of each other are often left unsaid. Why do you think this is? Do you think they could benefit from being more upfront with each other?
5. At what moment do you think the connection between the three women is the strongest and are they each aware of it?
6. Why do you think the author chose to centre the action on these specific three characters in Sylvie's life over the short span of two days?
7. A lot of the issues that surface throughout *The Weekend* are cross-generational and include the double standards of gender, and fear of vulnerability and rejection. Is there a moment when you related most to one of the characters?
8. Jude and Wendy both reflect on the tense relationships with their mothers. Do you think this treatment impacted them as adults? If yes, how so?
9. *The Weekend's* ending offers a new beginning for each of the three characters and we are given a clear idea of Wendy's future. What do you see happening for Jude and Adele?
10. How do you think the novel would change if Sylvie were still alive? Would the characters come to the same realisations?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## Welcome to Country

Marcia Langton

### About This Book

Tourism Australia statistics show that many overseas tourists, as well as Australians, are keen to learn more about Australia's first peoples. And while the Indigenous tourism industry continues to grow, no comprehensive travel guide is currently available.

Marcia Langton: *Welcome to Country* is a curated guidebook to Indigenous Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. Author Professor Marcia Langton offers fascinating insights into Indigenous languages and customs, history, native title, art and dance, storytelling, and cultural awareness and etiquette for visitors. There is also a directory of Indigenous tourism experiences, organised by state or territory, covering galleries and festivals, national parks and museums, communities that are open to visitors, as well as tours and performances.

### About the Author

Marcia Lynne Langton AO FASSA (born 31 October 1951) holds the foundation chair in Australian Indigenous studies at the University of Melbourne in the Faculty of Medicine. In 2016 she became distinguished professor and in 2017, associate provost

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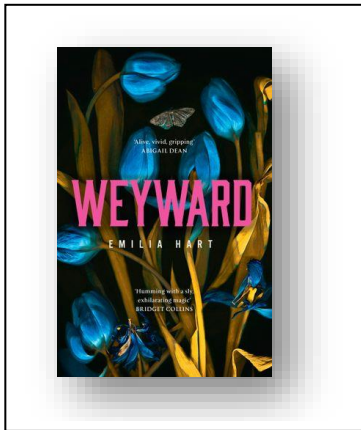
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### **Discussion Questions**

1. How did this story make you feel?
2. Did you learn anything new?
3. Did you race to end, or did you take your time reading this book?
4. Are there lingering questions from the book that you are still thinking about?
5. If you met the author, do you think you would sit down and ask about those lingering questions?
6. Did this book remind you of any other events or stories?
7. What do you think motivated the author to share his story?
8. Are there any areas you wished the author had elaborated on?



# Book Club Reading Notes



**Weyward**

**Emilia Hart**

## About This Book

**KATE, 2019:** Kate flees London – abandoning everything – for Cumbria and Weyward Cottage. There, a secret lurks in the bones of the house, hidden ever since the witch-hunts of the 17th century.

**VIOLET, 1942:** Violet is more interested in collecting insects and climbing trees than in becoming a proper young lady. Until a chain of shocking events changes her life forever.

**ALTHA, 1619:** Altha is on trial for witchcraft, accused of killing a local man. Known for her uncanny connection with nature and animals, she is a threat that must be eliminated.

## About The Author

Emilia Hart is a British-Australian writer. She was born in Sydney and studied English Literature and Law at the University of New South Wales before working as a lawyer in Sydney and London.

Emilia is a graduate of Curtis Brown Creative's Three Month Online Novel Writing Course and was Highly Commended in the 2021 Caledonia Novel Award. Her short fiction has been published in Australia and the UK. "Weyward" is her debut novel. She lives in London, England.

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## Discussion Questions

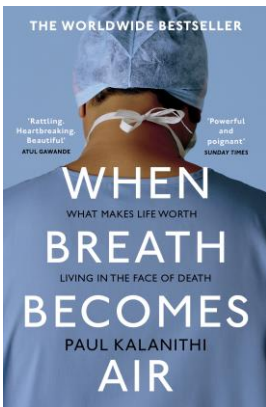
1. "Weyward" features three interconnected stories across different time periods. How do these narratives intertwine, and what thematic connections can you identify between the three women's experiences?
2. The book explores the themes of magic, natural knowledge, and female resilience. How do Altha, Kate, and Violet each embody these themes in their respective time periods?
3. Altha is accused of witchcraft in 1619. How do the witch-hunts and societal norms of that era shape her story, and what challenges does she face as an unusual woman with magical abilities?
4. Kate seeks refuge at Weyward Cottage in 2019 to escape an abusive partner. How does the cottage serve as a sanctuary for her, and what secrets does she uncover about her great aunt and the history of the place?
5. Violet longs for a different life in 1942, constrained by societal expectations. How does her desire for education and her connection to her mother's past influence her character development?
6. The book explores the power of the natural world and the interconnectedness of women with nature. How does nature play a role in each character's story, and what does it symbolize?
7. The word "weyward" is a recurring motif in the novel. What significance does it hold, and how does it relate to the experiences of the three women?
8. Each woman in the story faces challenges and adversity. How do their acts of resilience and defiance resonate with you, and what can readers learn from their experiences?
9. How do the time periods and settings, such as the witch trials in the 17th century and World War II in the 1940s, contribute to the overall atmosphere and themes of the book?
10. "Weyward" is a novel about generational connections and the endurance of women through time. How does the book emphasize the importance of passing down knowledge and stories from one generation to the next?





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# Book Club Reading Notes



**When Breath becomes Air**

**Paul Kalanithi**

## About This Book

At the age of thirty-six, on the verge of completing a decade's training as a neurosurgeon, Paul Kalanithi was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. One day he was a doctor treating the dying, the next he was a patient struggling to live.

When Breath Becomes Air chronicles Kalanithi's transformation from a medical student asking what makes a virtuous and meaningful life into a neurosurgeon working in the core of human identity - the brain - and finally into a patient and a new father.

What makes life worth living in the face of death? What do you do when life is catastrophically interrupted? What does it mean to have a child as your own life fades away? Paul Kalanithi died while working on this profoundly moving book, yet his words live on as a guide to us all.

## About the Author

Paul Kalanithi was a neurosurgeon and writer. He held degrees in English literature, human biology, and history and philosophy of science and medicine from Stanford and Cambridge universities before graduating from Yale School of Medicine. He also received the American Academy of Neurological Surgery's highest award for research. His reflections on doctoring and illness have been published in the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Paris Review Daily. Kalanithi died in March 2015, aged 37. He is survived by his wife, Lucy, and their daughter, Elizabeth Acadia.

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## Discussion Questions

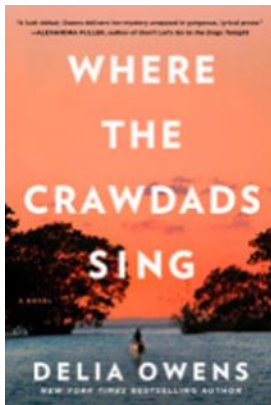
**How did you come away feeling, after reading this book? Upset? Inspired? Anxious? Less afraid?**

1. How do you think the years Paul spent, tending to patients and training to be a neurosurgeon, affected the outlook he had on his own illness? When Paul wrote that the question, he asked himself was not “why me,” but “why not me,” how did that strike you? Could you relate to it?
2. Paul had a strong background in the humanities and read widely throughout his life. Only after getting a Master’s in English Literature did he decide that medicine was the right path for him. Do you think this made him a better doctor? A different kind of doctor? If so, how? How has reading influenced your life?
3. What did you think of Paul and Lucy’s decision to have a child, in the face of his illness? When Lucy asked him if he worried that having a child would make his death more painful, and Paul responded, “Wouldn’t it be great if it did,” how did that strike you? Do you agree that life should not be about avoiding suffering, but about creating meaning?
4. Were there passages or sentences that struck you as particularly profound or moving?
5. Given that Paul died before the book was finished, what are some of the questions you would have wanted to ask him if he were still here today?
6. Paul was determined to face death with integrity, and through his book, demystify it for people. Do you think he succeeded?
7. In Lucy’s epilogue, she writes that “what happened to Paul was tragic, but he was not a tragedy.” Did you come away feeling the same way?
8. Is this a book you will continue thinking about, now that you are done? Do you find it having an impact on the way you go about your days?
9. Lucy also writes that, in some ways, Paul’s illness brought them closer – that she FELL even more deeply in love with the “beautiful, focused man” he became in the last year of his life. Did you find yourself seeing how that could happen?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



## Where the Crawdads Sing

Delia Owens

### About This Book

For years, rumors of the “Marsh Girl” have haunted Barkley Cove, a quiet town on the North Carolina coast. So in late 1969, when handsome Chase Andrews is found dead, the locals immediately suspect Kya Clark, the so-called Marsh Girl. But Kya is not what they say. Sensitive and intelligent, she has survived for years alone in the marsh that she calls home, finding friends in the gulls and lessons in the sand. Then the time comes when she yearns to be touched and loved. When two young men from town become intrigued by her wild beauty, Kya opens herself to a new life—until the unthinkable happens

### About The Author

Delia Owens is the co-author of three internationally bestselling nonfiction books about her life as a wildlife scientist in Africa—Cry of the Kalahari, The Eye of the Elephant, and Secrets of the Savanna. She has won the John Burroughs Award for Nature Writing and has been published in Nature, The African Journal of Ecology, and International Wildlife, among many others. She currently lives in Idaho, where she continues her support for the people and wildlife of Zambia. Where the Crawdads Sing is her first novel.

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## Discussion Questions

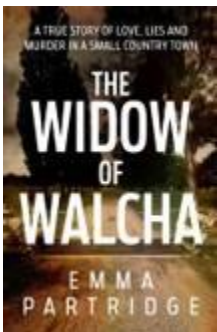
1. The North Carolina marsh where Kya lives has long been a sanctuary for outsiders. How does this setting shape the novel? How does growing up in this isolation affect Kya? In what ways does her status as an "outsider" change how others see her?
2. Why does Kya choose not to go back to school? Do you think she makes the wrong decision? How does Kya's lack of formal education shape her vision of the world? Would her character be different if she had gone to school?
3. After Jodie and Pa leave Kya alone, she becomes close to Jumpin' and Mabel. Why are these two adults drawn to Kya? What do they teach her about the world? Do you agree with Jumpin's decision to protect Kya from social services (p. 110) and to encourage her to live alone in the marsh? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think Kya's mother leaves in the beginning? Do you agree with her decision?
5. Kya often watches the other young people from town—she even nicknames them "Tallskinnyblonde, Ponytailfreckleface, Shortblackhair, Alwayswearspearls, and Roundchubbycheeks" (p. 80). What does Kya learn from observing these girls? Why do you think she keeps her watching secret? Do you agree with Kya's secrecy?
6. How is womanhood explored throughout the novel? What does being a woman mean to Kya? How does she relate to the other women in Barkley Cove?
7. Discuss Kya's relationship with Tate. How does Tate's understanding of Kya change over time? Is Tate a good partner for Kya? Why or why not?
8. Tate's father tells him that poems are important because "they make ya feel something" (p. 48). What does poetry mean to Tate? What does it mean to Kya? How does poetry help Kya throughout the novel?
9. On page 142, Kya watches the fireflies near her shack, and notices that the females can change their flashes to signal different things. What does this realization mean to Kya? What does it teach her about relationships? How does this lesson influence Kya's decisions in the second half of the novel?
10. Discuss how Kya's observations of nature shape her vision of the world. Do you think these lessons adequately prepare her for life in Barkley Cove? Do you think human society follows the same rules as the natural world? Should it? Why or why not?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Widow of Walcha**

**Emma Partridge**

## About This Book

The Widow of Walcha is a shocking true story about death, love and lies in the small NSW town of Walcha. All farmer Mathew Dunbar ever wanted was to find love and have a family of his own. That's why the much-loved grazier didn't hesitate to sign over his multi-million-dollar estate to his partner, Natasha Darcy, just months after meeting her. 'Don't forget you need to change your will', 46-year-old Natasha texted Mathew. After ensuring she was the sole beneficiary of his estate, Darcy adopted a false name to source animal sedatives, which were later blended with a cocktail of drugs before she gassed the 42-year-old with a canister of helium on his property, Pandora. In a stranger than fiction twist, Natasha's estranged husband - who she was once charged with trying to kill - was the first paramedic on the scene after the murder. Police later uncovered hundreds of Google searches made by Natasha in the lead-up to Mathew's death, including 'toxic wild plants that look like food' and 'the science of getting away with murder'. Following a two-month trial in the NSW Supreme Court, a jury found Natasha guilty of murdering Mathew in June 2021.

## About the Author

Emma Partridge, has been covering crime for various media for many years and is now the **Senior Crime Editor at Nine News**.

Journalist and author Emma Partridge travelled to the cool and misty town of Walcha in the Northern Tablelands of NSW in the months after Mathew Dunbar's death, drawn by the town's collective worry that Natasha was going to get away with murder. Partridge spent months researching the case, interviewing Mathew's friends, family and Natasha herself in an attempt to uncover her sickening web of lies and crimes.

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## Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience this book? Did it keep you engaged immediately, or did it take a while?
2. Would you read another title written by this author?
3. Was the ending satisfying?
4. Is this a genre you would usually read? If not, would this title encouraged o read more like this?
5. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?
6. If you could describe this book in one work, what would it be?
7. What did you think of the writing style? Could you get a feel for Emma's journalism background while reading this book?
8. Discuss the emotions you felt while reading this book.
9. True Crime often enhances the emotion in a story, was this the case for you?
10. Would you research further into this crime after reading this book?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Wintering**

**Krissy Kneen**

## About This Book

When Jessica's partner disappears into the dark Tasmanian forest, there is of course the mystery of what happened to him. The deserted car; the enigmatic final image on his phone.

There is the strange circle of local women, widows of disappeared men, with their edgy fellowship and unhinged theories.

And the forest itself: looming hugely over this tiny settlement on the remote tip of the island.

But for Jessica there is also the tight community in which she is still a stranger and Matthew was not. What secrets do they know about her own life that she doesn't? And why do they believe things that should not—cannot—be true. For her own sanity, Jessica needs to know two things. Who was Matthew? And who—or what—has he become?

## About the Author

Krissy Kneen has been shortlisted three times for the Queensland Premier's Literary awards. She is founding member of Eatbooks Inc and is the marketing and promotions officer at Avid Reader bookshop.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What is “wintering” and why do you think the author chose this term as the title for his book? Why does Harry want his son, Gus, to go with him into the wilderness and why does he choose to embark on this journey as the winter season is approaching?
2. At the opening of the novel, Berit Lovig says that “two stories began” the day that Gus came to see her in November. She says, “One of them was new and the other as old as this land itself.” (5) What does she mean by this? What is the story that is “as old as [the] land itself”?
3. Who reveals or narrates the two stories and who is the audience? Do you believe that they are reliable narrators? Why or why not? Does any single point of view seem to dominate the text? Explain. Does the book ultimately answer the question of why these characters wish to exchange their stories?
4. Explore the setting of the book. How does the setting mirror or otherwise help to reveal the psychological and emotional states of the characters who inhabit it? What other information does the setting allow us to access about the characters that we would perhaps not be privy to if they lived in a different place? How does “wilderness” come to work symbolically or metaphorically? What key themes does the setting help to reveal?
5. Why is Gus scared before he sets out into the wilderness with his father? What does he believe that they risk leaving behind? Why does Gus choose to go with his father rather than attend one of the colleges that has accepted him?
6. According to Berit, what is most important to the inhabitants of Gunflint? Does the rest of the novel support or disprove this view? Where in the novel can we see evidence of what means the most to Berit’s neighbors and family?
7. Gus tells Berit that “history and memory aren’t the same thing.” (76) What does he say is the difference between the two? Do you agree with him?
8. Why does Gus go after the bear even though he knows it could kill him? What does he cite as his primary motivation or influence? Does he seem to have learned anything from this experience? Is he changed by it? If so, how?



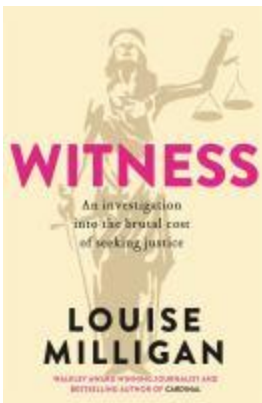


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# Book Club Reading Notes

**Witness**

**Louise Milligan**



## About This Book

A masterful and deeply troubling exposé based on the experiences of those who have the courage to come forward and face their abusers in high-profile child abuse and sexual assault cases. During this time, the #MeToo movement changed the zeitgeist, but time and again during her investigations Milligan watched how witnesses were treated in the courtroom and listened to them afterwards as they relived the associated trauma. Then she was a witness herself in the trial of the decade, *R v George Pell*. She interviews high-profile members of the legal profession, including judges and prosecutors. And she speaks to the defence lawyers who have worked in these cases, discovering what they really think about victims and the process, and the impact that this has on their own lives. Milligan also reveals never-before-published court transcripts, laying bare the flaws that are ignored, and a court system that can be sexist, unfeeling and weighted towards the rich and powerful. *Witness* is a call for change. Milligan exposes the devastating reality of the Australian legal system where truth is never guaranteed and, for victims, justice is often elusive. And even when they get justice, the process is so bruising, they wish they had never tried.

## About The Author

**RECIPIENT OF THE 2019 PRESS FREEDOM MEDAL**

Louise Milligan is an investigative reporter for ABC TV's *Four Corners* and the bestselling author of *Cardinal*, which won the Walkley Book Award and broke massive international news about the court case and successive and ultimately successful appeals involving one of the most senior members of the Catholic Church hierarchy.

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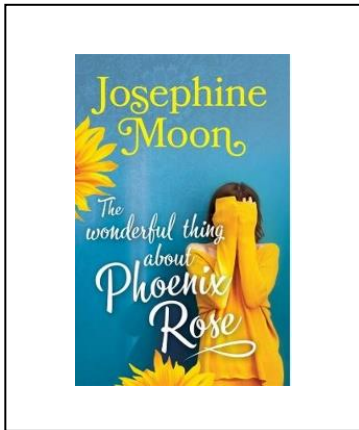
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## Discussion Questions

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?



# Book Club Reading Notes



## The Wonderful Thing about Phoenix Rose

Josephine Moon

### About This Book

Phoenix Rose is a 35-year-old neurodivergent teacher who is at a crossroads in her career and in her relationship with her boyfriend, Zack. But when she receives an urgent plea from a friend in Tasmania who needs to rehome her beloved animals, Phoenix, who has always led with her heart, spontaneously decides to help. When she suddenly finds herself the custodian of an eccentric dog, two cats, a clutch of chickens and a geriatric pony, she makes another snap decision - to provide a new home for them all herself. She enlists the help of Lily - a colourful younger woman who, like Phoenix, is autistic. Together the new friends must navigate unexpected twists, setbacks and moments of heartbreak and triumph as they both move towards a new identity and understanding of themselves.

### About The Author

Josephine Moon was born and raised in Brisbane, and had a false start in Environmental Science before completing a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and then a postgraduate degree in education. Twelve years and ten manuscripts later, her first novel *The Tea Chest* was picked up for publication and then shortlisted for an ABIA award. Her bestselling contemporary fiction is published internationally. Her books include *The Tea Chest*, *The Chocolate Promise*, *The Beekeeper's Secret*, *Three Gold Coins*, *The Gift of Life*, *The Cake Maker's Wish* and *The Jam Queens*. She now lives on acreage in the beautiful Noosa hinterland with her husband and son, and a tribe of animals that seems to increase in size each year. She wouldn't have it any other way.

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## Discussion Questions

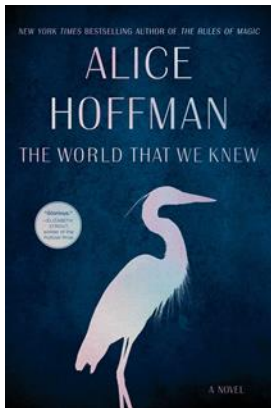
1. The book features neurodivergent characters, including the protagonist Phoenix Rose and her boyfriend Zack. How does the author portray their neurodivergence, and what impact does it have on their lives and relationships?
2. Phoenix's journey begins with her response to a plea from her terminally ill friend Olga. How does the theme of compassion and empathy play a role in the story, especially in relation to animals and people in need?
3. The book explores the challenges that Phoenix faces in her work as a teacher and her conflict with the acting principal, Evelyn. How does her profession and her experiences at work shape her character and the choices she makes?
4. Lily, one of Phoenix's online neurodivergent friends, plays a significant role in helping Phoenix on her journey. How does their friendship evolve, and what strengths do they bring to each other's lives?
5. Animals, including an old dog, two cats, chickens, and a geriatric pony, become important characters in the story. How do these animals contribute to the narrative, and what do they symbolize in the context of the book?
6. The novel touches on the concept of societal labels and preconceived ideas about people. How do these labels affect the characters' interactions and behaviour, and what does the book convey about breaking free from such stereotypes?
7. The journey from Tasmania to Brisbane is a central element of the plot. How does this physical journey mirror the characters' personal journeys and growth throughout the story?
8. The narrative explores themes of friendship, support, and rallying together to help those in need. How do the online friends come together to assist Phoenix, and what does this demonstrate about the power of online communities?
9. The book includes a recipe for gluten-free strawberry lemonade cakes. How does this addition contribute to the story, and what role does food play in the characters' lives?
10. The title of the book, "The Wonderful Thing about Phoenix Rose," suggests a sense of wonder and admiration. What are some of the qualities and actions that make Phoenix Rose a wonderful character, and how does she impact the lives of those around her?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The world that we knew**

**Alice Hoffman**

## About This Book

In Berlin, at the time when the world changed, Hanni Kohn knows she must send her twelve-year-old daughter away to save her from the Nazi regime. She finds her way to a renowned rabbi, but it's his daughter, Ettie, who offers hope of salvation when she creates a mystical Jewish creature, a rare and unusual golem, who is sworn to protect Lea. Once Ava is brought to life, she and Lea and Ettie become eternally entwined, their paths fated to cross, their fortunes linked.

## About The Author

Alice Hoffman is the author of more than thirty works of fiction, including *The World That We Knew*, *The Rules of Magic*, *The Marriage of Opposites*, *Practical Magic*, *The Red Garden*, the Oprah's Book Club selection *Here on Earth*, *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*, and *The Dovekeepers*. Her most recent novel is *The World That We Knew*. She lives near Boston.

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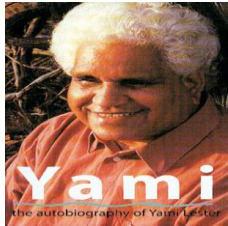
## Discussion Questions

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



Yami

Yami Lester

Caution! It is likely that the following reading guide will reveal, or at least allude to, key plot details. Therefore, if you haven't yet read this book, but are planning on doing so, you may wish to proceed with caution to avoid spoiling your later enjoyment

## About This Book

This is Yami Lester's story: from stockman to stirrer. Beginning in the heart of the Western Desert, Yami tells of his early years learning the country and the Law from the Ones Who Know. Of his years as a stockman, learning his trade on the vast, unfenced cattle stations of the Centre. Of these years living in the world of white people. And of the childhood memories stirred by a voice on the radio - memories of the day when the ground shook and a black mist came up from the south and covered the camp. Of the sickness that followed, and the blindness that changed his life forever. Yami's is a unique life of challenge and change, courage, and humour. From the remote Centralian outback to the hand back of Uluru, from bomb tests at Maralinga to the Royal Commission in London, Yami's memories are about the making of modern Australian history

## About The Author

James Yami Lester OAM was a Yankunytjatjara man, an Indigenous person of northern South Australia. Lester, who survived nuclear testing in outback Australia, is best known as an anti-nuclear and indigenous rights advocate

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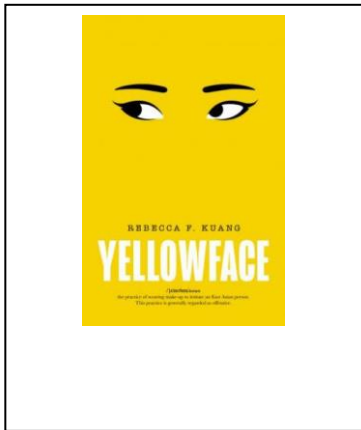
### Discussion Questions

1. Did Yami's story surprise you in anyway? If so, how?
2. Have you heard of Yami Lester before reading this autobiography?
3. Did you race to end, or did you take your time reading this book?
4. What event or chapter stuck with you the most? How did it make you feel?
5. Are there lingering questions from the book that you are still thinking about?
6. If you met the author, do you think you would sit down and ask about those lingering questions?
7. Did this book remind you of any other stories or books?
8. What do you think motivated the author to share his story?
9. Are there any areas you wished the author had elaborated on?
10. Are there any people mentioned within this book that you would like to read about?





# Book Club Reading Notes



**Yellowface**

**Rebecca Kuang**

## About This Book

Athena Liu is a literary darling. Juniper Hayward is literally nobody.

### White lies

When Athena dies in a freak accident, Juniper steals her unpublished manuscript and publishes it as her own under the ambiguous name June Song.

### Dark humour

But as evidence threatens Juniper's stolen success, she will discover exactly how far she will go to keep what she thinks she deserves.

### Deadly consequences...

What happens next is entirely everyone else's fault.

## About The Author

Rebecca F. Kuang is a Marshall Scholar, translator, and award-winning, #1 New York Times bestselling author of the Poppy War trilogy and Babel: An Arcane History, among others. She has an MPhil in Chinese Studies from Cambridge and an MSc in Contemporary Chinese Studies from Oxford; she is now pursuing a PhD in East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale.

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## Discussion Questions

1. June Hayward, the protagonist, is an unreliable narrator. How does her unreliability shape our understanding of the story and its themes?
2. The novel opens with June fantasizing about being her friend Athena Liu and feeling a strong urge to steal Athena's life. How does this initial fantasy set the tone for the rest of the story, and what does it reveal about June's character?
3. The novel explores themes of cultural appropriation, identity, and race. How does June's appropriation of Athena's work and identity shed light on these themes, and what commentary does the book offer on these issues?
4. June goes to great lengths to present herself as an author of Athena's manuscript, "The Last Front." How does she manipulate the narrative to make it her own, and what are the consequences of her actions?
5. "Yellowface" is described as a satirical literary thriller. How does the satirical element of the story critique the commercial publishing industry and contemporary conversations about race and appropriation?
6. The novel deals with questions of authorship, the boundaries of storytelling, and who gets to tell certain stories. How does June grapple with these questions, and what are the broader implications for authors and readers?
7. June's narrative style is characterized by zippy and immersive language, but it also reveals her immaturity and obsession. How does this narrative style affect your reading experience and understanding of June's character?
8. What role does social media play in the story, particularly in the backlash June faces for her actions? How does the online landscape contribute to the themes of the novel?
9. The novel explores layers of deceit, revision, and contradictions within June's storytelling. How do these elements challenge the reader's perception of truth and reality?
10. "Yellowface" is a work that doesn't shy away from being overt and explicit in its critique of the publishing industry and cultural appropriation. How does the novel's approach to storytelling and social commentary impact your reading experience?



Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**The Yield**

**Tara June Winch**

## About This Book

August Gondiwindi has been living on the other side of the world for ten years when she learns of her grandfather's death. She returns home for his burial, wracked with grief and burdened with all she tried to leave behind. Her homecoming is bittersweet as she confronts the love of her kin and news that Prosperous is to be repossessed by a mining company. Determined to make amends she endeavours to save their land – a quest that leads her to the voice of her grandfather and into the past, the stories of her people, the secrets of the river.

Profoundly moving and exquisitely written, Tara June Winch's *The Yield* is the story of a people and a culture dispossessed. But it is as much a celebration of what was and what endures, and a powerful reclaiming of Indigenous language, storytelling and identity.

## About The Author

Tara June Winch is an Australian (Wiradjuri) author. Her first novel, *Swallow the Air* won several literary awards. In 2008, she was mentored by Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka as part of the prestigious Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. After *The Carnage*, her second book was published in 2016. Her third, *The Yield*, was published in 2019. She resides in France with her husband, daughter, cat and chickens.

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## Discussion Questions

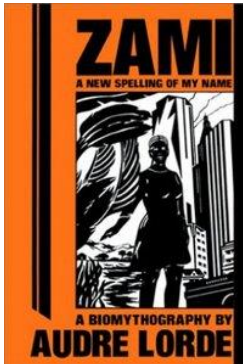
1. Tara June Winch chose to give voices to August, Albert Goondiwindi and Ferdinand Greenleaf. Why do you think she chose the split narrative? What is the impact of using such diverse voices and experiences?
2. Poppy says, 'Nothing ever really dies.' In what way is this idea supported in *The Yield*? What impact do those who are no longer alive still have on family and community?
3. August Goondiwindi left Prosperous a long time ago but has never felt quite whole. Once back, August finds that she desperately wants to be home. What does Prosperous now offer her that it didn't provide years ago? What are the fundamental elements of 'home'?
4. Poppy says 'just tell the truth and someone will hear it eventually'. Is it important for everybody's stories to be told? What are the dangers in silencing some people's stories?
5. Elsie says, 'There was a war here against the local people. In that war the biggest victim was the culture, you know...culture has no armies does it.' What is it that Elsie is lamenting here?
6. Language is a powerful tool that can place and displace people, empower or take control away. August says every family has its own special language. How can families be seen to have their own language? How does this help to shape families? Why might it cause difficulties for people outside of the family?
7. After they discover his letters, August defends Greenleaf's actions saying that he believed that what he was doing was right and he regretted the outcome. Aunt Missy tells her that he only regretted it when it negatively affected him. Which perspective do you agree with?
8. How did you feel about Poppy's method of bringing Wiradjuri language back through stories?
9. How do you interpret the title of the novel?





Townsville

# Book Club Reading Notes



**Zami: A New Spelling of my Name**

**By Audre Lorde**

## About This Book

ZAMI is a fast-moving chronicle. From the author's vivid childhood memories in Harlem to her coming of age in the late 1950s, the nature of Audre Lorde's work is cyclical. It especially related the linkage of women who have shaped her... Lorde brings into play her craft of lush description and characterization. It keeps unfolding page after page.

## About The Author

Lorde's poetry was published very regularly during the 1960s – in Langston Hughes' 1962 *New Negro Poets, USA*; in several foreign anthologies; and in black literary magazines. During this time, she was politically active in civil rights, anti-war, and published by the Poet's Press and edited by Diane di Prina, a former classmate and friend from Huner College High School. Dudley Randall, a poet and critic, asserted in his review of the books that Lorde "does not wave a black flag, but her blackness is there, implicit, in the bone."

Her second volume, *Cables to Rage* (1970), which was mainly written during her tenure at Tougaloo College in Mississippi, addressed themes of love, betrayal, childbirth and the complexities of raising children. It was particularly noteworthy for the poem "Martha", in which Lorde poetically confirms her homosexuality. "We shall love each other here it ever at all." Later books continued her political aims in lesbian and gay rights, and feminism. In 1980, together with Barbara Smith and Cherrie Moraga, she co-founded *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*, the first U.S. publisher for women of colour. Lorde was State Poet of New York from 1991 to 1992.

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## Discussion Questions

1. How can we read this novel as a künstlerroman? In what ways do we see Audre change or mature through each relationship? What is she looking for and what does she learn?
2. What is the importance of writing and poetry in and to this text?
3. How does Lorde discuss the issues of difference within communities and social movements? How does she discuss the intersections of race, gender and sexuality in the text?
4. Why does the novel end with the abrupt end of Audre's relationship with Kitty? How does the epilogue help us make sense of the novel? What is the significance of the title? What does Zami mean?
5. Any other insights/observations/questions you'd like to talk about?