

Safe Distance

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A GUIDE FOR READING GROUPS

Safe Distance moves between landscapes and interiors, the beauty of Southeast Asia and the wreckage of war, between comedy and grief, and between what we show the world and what we carry in silence. The questions below are designed to open rather than close, and to take your group wherever the book takes you.

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. How did the use of the second person in Noor's Story shape the way you received her throughout the rest of the book?
2. At what point did you sense that Edie was carrying something deeper than burnout?

ON EDIE

3. What does Edie's sensitivity to Noor being reduced to the word "refugee" reveal about her own relationship with labels?
4. How does Edie use humour both to reveal and to deflect from what she is feeling?
5. What does the fragmented revelation of Edie's childhood allow the reader to understand that a chronological account might not?
6. How does Edie's description of "safe distance" as her love language illuminate the title by the end of the book?
7. Amir is funny, awkward and drawn to Edie, but unable to offer her the relationship she wants. How did those contradictions shape your perception of him?
8. What has changed in Edie between her arrival in Ubud and her final day on Tioman Island?

ON NOOR

9. How did experiencing Noor only through Edie's perspective shape your sense of knowing her?
10. How did Noor's decision to leave the relative safety of Turkey affect your understanding of why someone might risk a dangerous sea crossing?
11. What does the relationship between Edie and Noor suggest about what makes a friendship real?
12. What does Edie's devotion to Noor reveal about what caring for others gives her – and allows her to avoid?

ON CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

13. How did the contrast between Edie's freedom to travel and Noor's need to flee shape the way you understood Edie's journey?
14. What did each of the book's three settings – Bali, Kuala Lumpur and Tioman Island – bring out in Edie?

ON BIGGER THEMES

15. What does the image of Edie snorkelling above manta rays while imagining Noor and her children drowning suggest about beauty and suffering existing in the same world?
16. How did the book affect your understanding of what it means to witness suffering through a screen while continuing to live an ordinary life?
17. When Edie decides to leave London, do you see her as still running away or as beginning to move towards something?
18. What does water come to represent across the different stages of Edie's journey?
19. How does Elsa's somatic understanding of trauma reframe Edie's earlier behaviour and physical reactions?
20. What does Edie's story reveal about how the survival strategies formed in childhood can shape an adult life?

A FINAL QUESTION

21. What stayed with you from the book?