



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Dirt Creek

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Dirt Creek*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Dirt Creek*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. The novel begins with the discovery of Esther Bianchi's body, as witnessed by the chorus of the town's children. Why do you think the author chose to open the book with this scene? What is the effect of this?
2. What do you think about the chapters entitled "We"? Do you like them? How do you think they color and inform the story? What is the overall effect of this omniscient collective voice, in your opinion?
3. "We had never thought about the place we lived in terms of good or bad. Our town wasn't a choice, for us. It just was" (p. 47). How does the novel's setting influence both the nature of Esther's death and its investigation? How does the hot Australian summer play a role?
4. What are some of the references to the Australian landscape and animal life in the book? How do they color your perception of Durton and its inhabitants? Do you agree with the author that small towns or communities can be like living, breathing entities?
5. Hayley Scrivenor has chosen to tell this story in several distinct styles, through a mix of points of view. For example, Ronnie's voice is in the first person while Lewis, Sarah, and Constance are in the third person. What is the effect of this? How do the different styles and voices shape the reader's understanding of the different characters and the crime that has occurred?
6. Violence, both domestic and otherwise, can be found through this book. Were there scenes you found hard to read or that you felt should have been left out?
7. "None of us can escape who we are when others aren't looking; we can't guess what we're capable of until it's too late" (p. 320). At the end of the novel, Sarah realizes she is luckier than Shelly but no better. While she and Shelly are very different people, both have always tried to help others in their own way. However, both women caused harm to another when they did not intend to, although the consequences in their respective situations are vastly different. What do you make of the consequences for each of the various characters in the book? Do these accord with the seriousness of their actions?

8. Why do you think Shelly succumbed so meekly to her fate: allowing her car to be taken for testing and her DNA checked, for example, which led directly to her being arrested? Why do you think she later allows herself to imagine the accident happened to an animal, rather than to Esther?
9. What is the point Sarah's father is trying to make in his conversation with her when he says that people confuse making good choices with having good choices? What are some examples from the story in which characters make misleading or incorrect assumptions about other people and their choices?
10. There are many examples and stories in the book about childhood and the experience of growing up in different circumstances. How can a child's situation, their parents, the parenting styles used to raise them and the experiences—including traumas—of their childhood have long-lasting effects on their lives? Do you think much has changed between childhood in 2001, the time during which the book is set, and childhood now? Discuss.
11. The end of the novel jumps ahead in time for many characters. What did this do for your understanding of the novel?
12. Was there a character's perspective that you would have liked to hear more of? What unanswered questions do you have after reading?