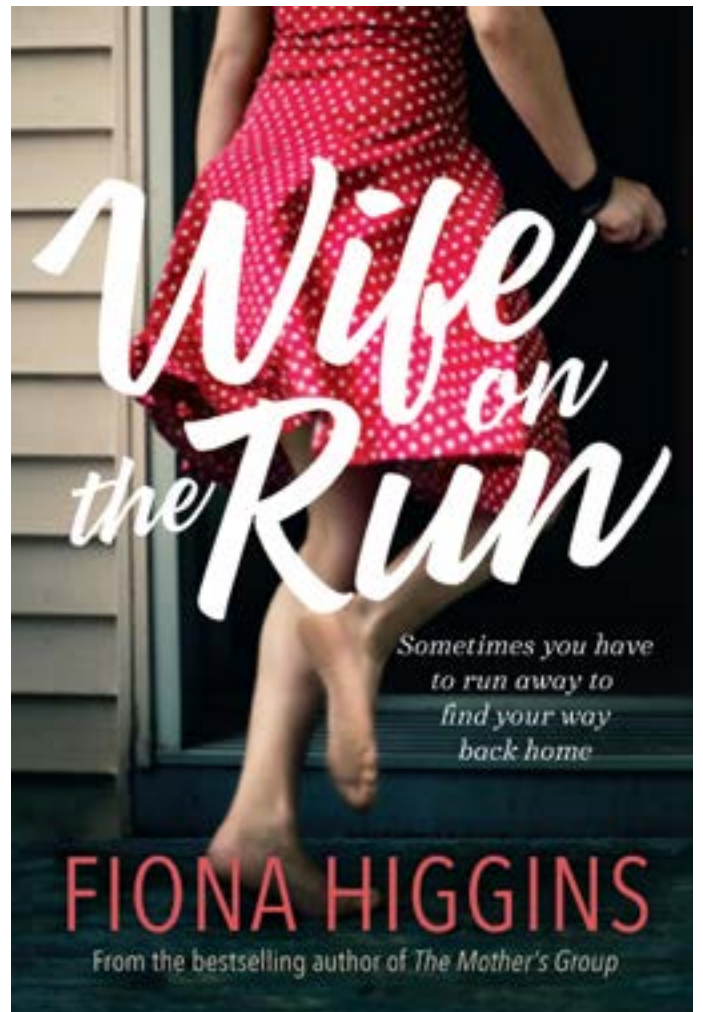


ALLEN & UNWIN



# READING GROUP NOTES

**Contents:** About the book (2) About the author (2)  
The author on writing (2) Suggested points for discussion (3)  
Further reading (4)

## About the book

A mother's greatest fear...

A wife's worst nightmare...

When two technology-related disasters hit within days of each other, Paula knows her comfortable suburban life has been irrevocably blown apart. One involves the public shaming of her teenage daughter, the other is a discovery about her husband that shocks her to her core. With her world unravelling around her, Paula does the only thing that makes any sense to her: she runs away from it all.

She pulls her children out of school and takes off on a trip across Australia with her elderly father and his caravan. The only rule is No Technology - no phones, no Facebook, no Instagram, no tablets, games or computers. It's time to get back to basics and learn how to be a family again.

It all sounds so simple - and for a while, it is. But along the way Paula will meet new, exciting complications, and realise that running away is only a temporary solution. The past has to be faced before the future can begin.

A thrilling, tender and hugely entertaining story of loss, love and discovery from the bestselling author of *The Mothers' Group*.

## About the author

Born in Melbourne and educated in Sydney, Fiona Higgins has worked in the philanthropic sector over the past 15 years. Her previous roles include Executive Director for The Caledonia Foundation, Philanthropy Services Manager for Cambooya Services, Programme Manager for The Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and Communications Officer at Australian Red Cross (NSW). Currently she is Director of Grantmaking and Evaluation at Australian Philanthropic Services, and sits on the board of The Caledonia Foundation and The Royal Agricultural Society of NSW Foundation. Fiona's memoir, *Love in the Age of Drought*, was published in 2009 by Macmillan and her first novel, *The Mothers' Group*, was published by Allen & Unwin in 2012, with foreign rights sold in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. She holds tertiary qualifications in the humanities and social sciences, and lives in Bali with her husband and three children.

## Author, Fiona Higgins, on writing *Wife on the Run*

My new novel is all about families and relationships – territory I'm more than familiar with, as a wife of almost ten years, a mother to three children under the age of 7, and as a sister and a daughter.

In terms of the narrative – in which the main character, Paula, throws in her ordinary life to take off around Australia with her two children and her ageing father, I do have some experience of this. In 1999, fresh out of university, I rode a bicycle 16,455 kilometres around Australia to raise funds for development projects in Indonesia.

I definitely drew on that experience – passing through tiny townships, large cities, and vast, empty nothingness - to write about Paula's journey with her family.

Like *The Mothers' Group*, the characters of *Wife on the Run* simply began to 'talk to me'. Hamish emerged first, as a husband working hard to cater to the financial and social requirements of family life, yet feeling underwhelmed by its routinized nature and the altered state of his marriage. Paula, his wife, then emerged and began 'talking to me' too, mainly about how tired she was, how happy she should be with her life, but . . . and there was always a 'but'. I began writing their stories down, and *Wife on the Run* emerged.

## For discussion

- ☞ In what ways does technology affect the lives and relationships of the characters in *Wife on the Run*? How does it both bring them together and tear them apart?
- ☞ How do the alternate viewpoints of both Paula and Hamish influence and challenge our understanding of their relationship?
- ☞ In what ways do Paula and Caitlin struggle with issues of body image and sexuality? What pressures do they feel when it comes to their bodies?
- ☞ What prejudices do the characters encounter on their journey? And what prejudices do they discover in themselves?
- ☞ In what ways does sex become a major factor in the relationship between Hamish and Paula? In what ways do their attitudes differ?
- ☞ 'The things that help you most in life are the things you learn outside the classroom' (p.115)  
Consider this statement from Sid. To what extent do you think this is true? What do the characters learn by stepping outside their daily routine? What else do they learn from Sid?
- ☞ Discuss the ways in which Paula and Hamish are both deceived by appearances through their relationships with Marcelo and Lisel. What do these revelations teach them about their relationship, and about themselves?
- ☞ 'How could she know what was best, as the product of a different generation?' (p.20)  
Consider Paula's question above. In what ways does the book explore the challenges that social media poses for parenting?
- ☞ Considering the journey of the characters, do you think it's possible to truly change as a person?

## Suggested further reading

*The Mothers' Group* by Fiona Higgins

*Mothers and Daughters* by Kylie Ladd

*The Yellow Eyes of Crocodiles* by Katherine Pancol

*The Slap* by Christos Tsiolkas

*Freeing Grace* by Charity Norman