

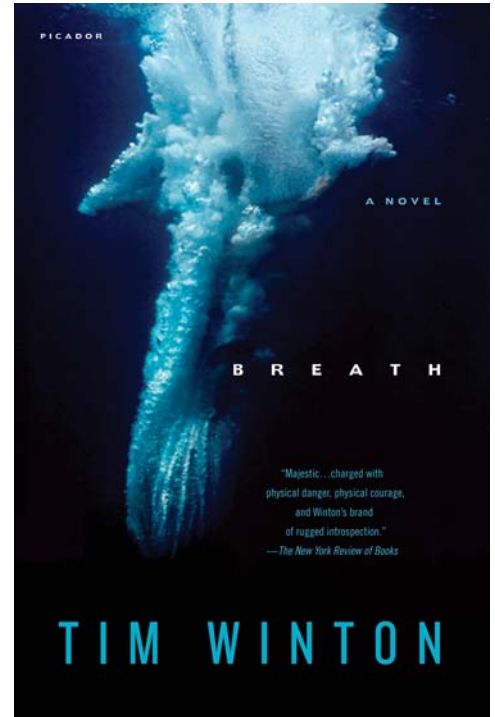
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Breath*

*A Novel*

*by Tim Winton*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Breath* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Breath*.

### About the Book

*Breath* is a story of risk, of learning one's limits by challenging death. On the wild, lonely coast of Western Australia, two thrill-seeking teenage boys fall under the spell of a veteran big-wave surfer named Sando. Their mentor urges them into a regiment of danger and challenge, and the boys test themselves and each other on storm swells and over shark-haunted reefs. The boys give no thought to what they could lose, or to the demons that drive their mentor on into ever-greater danger. Venturing beyond all caution—in sports, relationships, and sex—each character approaches a point from which none of them will return undamaged.

## About the Author

The preeminent Australian novelist of his generation, **Tim Winton** is the author of the bestselling *Cloudstreet*, *The Riders*, and *Dirt Music*, among many other books. He lives in Western Australia.

## Discussion Questions

1. The story of Pikelet's experiences with Sando and Loonie are framed by scenes from his life as an older man. How would you describe his attitude towards the young man he was back then, and toward the choices he made?
2. Is Sando a good influence on the boys? Does he help them in any way? Do you think he has their best interests at heart?
3. Pikelet and Loonie come together as friends over their shared fascination with risk. How do they ultimately experience surfing differently? What is it about them that leads their paths to diverge over the course of the story?
4. What is Eva's attitude toward Sando's relationship with the boys? What feelings does it bring up about her own situation and her own history?
5. What do you think draws Pikelet and Eva together? What does each of them get from their relationship? Do you think Pikelet bears some responsibility for what happens between them?
6. Look at the scene where Sando, Loonie and Pikelet go to surf the Nautilus (p. 144-147). Why do you think Pikelet chooses not to surf that day? How does his refusal affect the course of his relationship with Sando and Loonie?
7. Several times in the story characters mention a resistance to being an "ordinary person," and many of the risks they take are motivated by a desire to stand outside ordinary life. Is this a healthy impulse? Have you experienced it, or known people who have? How do people you know handle it?
8. Later in the book we learn that Pikelet spent some time in an institution. What do you think happened in his mind to get him there? How did the surfing and the relationship with Eva affect him later in life?
9. Near the end of the story Pikelet sees footage of an aerial skier falling, howling in agony, and it reminds him of himself, a "slow-motion replay of how my mind had worked for too long" (p. 214). What do you think he recognizes in the skier and himself?
10. Do you think Pikelet and Loonie learn something of value from the risks they take? Are they better off for having endured the fear and surfed with Sando? Is it necessary to take these kinds of risks in order to feel alive?

11. Why do you think it's so important for the narrator to show his daughters that he surfs, that he "also does something completely pointless and beautiful"? What kind of relationship do you think he has with them?

12. How do the two boys' relationships with their parents contribute to their behavior as teenagers? Is surfing and their bond with Sando somehow a reaction against the place they came from?

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