



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

The Survivors

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *The Survivors*. 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 *The Survivors*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. The book is named after the sculpture called *The Survivors* that stands sentry at the caves in Evelyn Bay, which is almost a character in its own right. Discuss the meaning and significance of the title and the sculpture in the context of the book and its characters.
2. After the storm, Kieran accepted that he was partly to blame for the deaths of his brother and Toby. How do you think this influenced the way he lived his life from that point on? How do the events of the novel change this, and what effect might that have on Kieran's future?
3. Why do you think Kieran is more successful than some of the other characters at living with the trauma he experienced? What are some of the ways in which the other characters try to cope, and how successful are they?
4. How has meeting Mia and becoming a parent changed Kieran's perception of his parents and Trish Birch?
5. Kieran's relationship with his parents was irrevocably changed after his brother's death. How has Brian's dementia wrought further changes, both positive and negative?
6. How has Olivia's life been affected by the loss of her sister Gabby in the storm?
7. Liam Gilroy says to Kieran on page 158, "You kind of ruined my life, you know?" How have Liam's father's death and the circumstances in which it occurred shaped the man Liam has become?
8. What are some of the behaviors described in the novel that lend weight to the idea of a culture of toxic masculinity?
9. The opening of Chapter 11 (page 95) describes all the ways in which Finn Elliott was "the real deal." Later, we see some examples of behavior that paint Finn in a less flattering light. However, many of these more questionable behaviors are excused, or even celebrated. What do you think this says about the idea of masculinity in our society?

10. What are some examples shown in the book of ways in which women are affected by or victims of the sort of behavior that Finn, Toby, Kieran, and Ash engage in, especially as teenagers and young men?
11. Kieran, Finn, Ash, and Sean are all what many people might call “nice guys”: Are they really?
12. Kieran’s admission that some of the behaviors he took part in were not even fun speaks to the strength and predominance of this culture in our society. Why do you think that is?
13. “In a place like Evelyn Bay, people knew each other’s business.” What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a small community? How do these play out in the novel?
14. George Barlin says of Evelyn Bay, “Places like this, they need to be tight-knit to work. Once the trust is broken, they’re stuffed. Whether people see it or not, the writing’s on the wall.” What do you think he means? Do you think this is true?
15. What are some of the effects of the outpourings on the social media site EBOCH on Bronte’s murder investigation?
16. How is the ability to be anonymous on the EBOCH site helpful or unhelpful?
17. Mia says of the storm, “I’m not for a minute saying that [what happened to Finn] was a good thing, of course not. But you’re right. It did change your life, but I’m not sure it was in the way you sometimes think it was ... Honestly, Kieran, I think it made you a better person. Kinder, definitely. More aware of other people, more conscious of your actions.” Do you think Mia is right? What was it about the events of the storm that prompted a change in Kieran? How did he continue to change in its aftermath?
18. Did you suspect at any point that Sean might have been involved in either (or both) of the deaths of Bronte and Gabby? Why or why not, do you think?
19. At the time, Sean had tried to talk his friends out of writing their names in the rock, “with predictable results.” Sean paid a social price for his non-conformity. What were some of the ways Sean was different from Kieran and Ash growing up? How was he kept on the outer?
20. Why do you think Sean feels so angry, humiliated, and frightened when his attempt to kiss Gabby is rejected?
21. What effect has the secret of Gabby Birch’s death had on Sean’s life since the storm, do you think?
22. Ash and Kieran were once very close, but have grown into quite different men. Why, do you think? How have their experiences differed, and what effect has this had on them?
23. Do you think Ash’s relationship with Olivia will survive? Why or why not?

24. The small Tasmanian coastal town of Evelyn Bay is the central setting of the novel. How does this setting inform our ideas about the people who live there and the events that take place there? How does the setting itself impact the events of the novel?
25. The treacherous caves in Evelyn Bay are the location for several major events in this book. It is near here that Finn and Toby died and where Kieran survived, it is where Kieran and Olivia met in secret and where the boys scratched their names into the rock, and it is where Gabby Birch was left to die. It is also the location of the sculpture of 'The Survivors'. In what ways does the idea of the caves, and the risks and pleasures they offer, permeate the novel?
26. Jane Harper has chosen to tell this story in the third person past tense, almost entirely from Kieran's point of view. What is the effect of this? How does it shape the reader's understanding of Kieran himself, as well as of the other characters in the novel?
27. The novel begins with a prologue from an omniscient viewpoint that describes a scene between an anonymous man and woman. Why do you think the author chose to open the book with this scene? What is the effect of this prologue, and how could it be seen to be misleading? What does this suggest to us about the assumptions we make?