



**‘The Dead Path’
Reading Group Notes**

1. Is Nicholas Close a likeable person, or unlikeable? How would you describe him? Were you able to sympathise with him? Why or why not?
2. How might the outcome of events been different had Nicholas not been a widower or afflicted with the ability to see the dead?
3. Second sight affected Nicholas’s attitude toward religion. His sister Suzette also briefly had second sight; how is her viewpoint and attitude to religion different from her brother’s?
4. Motherhood and maternal actions are portrayed in many ways in the book – Katharine’s, Rowena’s mother’s, Hannah’s mother’s, even Eleanor Bretherton’s as ‘mother’ of the Green Man’s church. What are some similarities between the mothers’ behaviours? What are the intentions? What are the telling differences?
5. Nicholas’s father is a strongly felt but unseen presence in the book. Is Donald Close a constructive or destructive influence? On who?
6. How is the Green Man portrayed? As a natural or a supernatural force? Why might the story’s males and females respond to him differently? At what level (cranial, corporeal, spiritual) does he respond to the characters in the novel, and why?
7. Several men in the novel – e.g. Gavin Boye, Tony Barisi, Donald Close, and Nicholas – are portrayed as being guided by base, almost animal instincts. What were those instincts, and how did they advantage Quill? The actions of the women in the novel are often portrayed as more cerebrally driven – but this advantaged Quill, too. In what ways? How does this fit with what the Green Man might be?
8. Motifs of the elements – clay, fire, water, wood – recur through the story. What sort of a mood do they conspire to build? When do they complement each other, and when are they juxtaposed? How do their associations with characters wax, wane and change as the story develops?
9. Blood recurs as a symbol in descriptive text and dialogue – why might that be? How does this very human element fit with the other natural elements of stone, water and wood?
10. The city in which ‘The Dead Path’ is principally set remains unnamed, yet its location is obvious to many Australians. Why do you think the author chose not to refer to the city by name?
11. The book is self-contained, yet finishes with possibilities for the minds of curious readers. What do you think might become of Nicholas, Hannah and Laine?
12. Nicholas begins the story very much as a loner, but rebuilds some relationships and forms new ones in the face of the peril of Mrs Quill – in some cases with fatal consequences. What does this say about the qualities of solitude and solidarity?
13. Katharine’s regard for her dead husband Donald is complex. How and why does it change through the course of the novel?
14. What role does the river play in the novel?
15. The notion of façades presents regularly through the book, the most obvious being that Rowena is more than she appears. What other characters – and places – proved to be much more than they first appear? Which was most surprising, and why?
16. Do you think the cover successfully represents the story contained within?