

BEFORE THIS IS OVER, by Amanda Hickie

Bookclub Questions

1. Sean looks for solutions to their problems in the outside world, gets angry when the government fails to take steps to quarantine the country and sees risks such as breaking their isolation to look for coffee at Lily's, as unimportant. Hannah sees turning inwards, shutting the world out and concentrating on the pantry as the solution. Are their differences a problem or a strength?
2. Hannah allows Daniel to stay, violently shuts out Gwen and only lets in Ella after two days isolation in the garage. Do you disagree with her decisions? What would be the consequences of your choices?
3. Hannah obsessively checks online newspapers (The Times, The Herald), blogs (An Aussie in Paradise, the student's graph of disease terms) and websites (CDC, WHO) and uses them as her eyes on the world. How much can she rely on them? How good are we at weighing up what is important or true from all the information we are bombarded with?
4. Once the power goes out, the family's knowledge of the outside world becomes restricted, first to the internet on their phones then to texts. In real life, how often do we not know the full picture of a situation when we react to it? How does uncertainty affect us?
5. When the orphans die, Hannah feels fear for her own children but has difficulty feeling a real connection to the boys she didn't know, or to the nameless thousands dead. Hannah focuses on the problems and people in front of her. How does physical distance affect the ways we respond to a crisis? Do we react differently to a crisis in our town? In our street? Is that good or bad?
6. Sean asks 'How do you measure compassion? Is it an unthinking reflex, even if that achieves nothing? Or is it careful and considered and planned?' Hannah says 'I can count packets of pasta.... I can keep six people alive for three weeks. That makes me a hero. The rest is up to someone else.' Is Hannah's planning compassionate or hard-hearted?
7. How does Hannah's experience of cancer affect her?
8. Throughout history there have been epidemics. In 1918, Australia was geographically isolated and fared better than many other countries during the Spanish Flu. Do you think our modern world would be more or less resilient in the face of such a disaster?
9. Zac is frustrated with his parents' attempts to shield him from the bad news they receive via texts, and from what they find in Stuart's house. Do Hannah and Sean understand Zac? He has difficulty making them take his graph seriously. Do they underestimate him? Do we as a society make assumptions about teenagers?