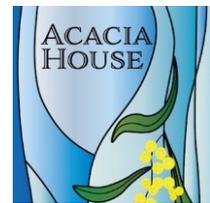


Acacia House: Discussion points for book groups.



1. Alice, Gabby and Maedhbh come to Acacia House knowing little of hospice palliative care. Has their learning experience changed your ideas about palliative care, and about hospice palliative care in particular?
2. It has been argued that caring is a relationship in which the caring and cared for share an interest in their mutual well-being.¹ How is that relationship explored in *Acacia House*?
3. Narratives that deal with care for the dying and for those who grieve are likely to cause unease. How has *Acacia House* sought to relieve this 'unease'? Is it successful?
4. While palliative care nursing is central to the novel, which other themes resonated with you?
5. 'Spiritual chaos, Alice. If you don't know the nature of your god, what's the point of a god at all?' What challenges to traditional Christian religious beliefs does the novel explore?
6. Gabby's affinity with the natural world (which is introduced in chapter three with the flying ants) appears highly symbolic. What role does such symbolism play in the course of the novel?
7. What does the novel suggest about multiculturalism in Australia?
8. Alice's attempts to spread anti-war materials at the hospice face criticism. Should health care be quarantined from politics?
9. The nurses bring subtly different approaches to care. Is there one character you would prefer caring for you? Why?
10. 'It is only in grief that we become most truly ourselves.'² Does the novel support this assertion?
11. Can self-sacrificing goodwill, as exhibited by many of the nurses, survive in a neo-liberal world? Should it?
12. Discourse on dying, for many in Western society, remains a lingering taboo. Yet a growing number of Australians are writing Advance Care Plans. Which elements of the novel promote such planning, and are they effective?
13. How is hope manifest in readings of *Acacia House*?

¹ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp34-35.

² Simon Critchley, *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, London, Granta Books, 2008 p.xxvii