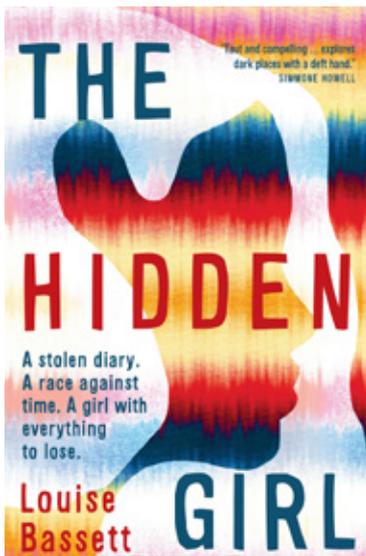


BOOK CLUB NOTES

THE HIDDEN GIRL



FOR READERS AGED 13+
AUGUST 2021
9781760654788
PAPERBACK

**MEL HAS EVERYTHING TO LOSE —
BUT HOW CAN SHE STAND BACK
WHEN SHE KNOWS SOMETHING'S
NOT RIGHT?**

Within the pages of a stolen diary, Melati discovers a coded cry for help – the diary belongs to Devi, an Indonesian teenager who is being held by traffickers. Mel races across the island of Java and against the clock to work out Devi's identity and where she's being held. Before long the pieces fall into place and Mel must put her own life on the line to save a girl she's never met.

"The Hidden Girl is a taut and compelling crime YA that explores dark places with a deft hand. Melati is my favourite kind of heroine – rebellious, self-deprecating and determined. Her sure sense of self and justice feels relevant to young people today, who face a broken world but remain undaunted. I loved her journey."

— **Simonne Howell**

"I loved this enthralling, fast-paced mystery, which is also a genuinely moving story about overcoming past mistakes and the power of forgiveness. Melati is a complex and loveable heroine whose ability to get herself in and out of trouble had me on the edge of my seat. A page-turner!"

— **Lisa Walker**

WALKER BOOKS

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “But on nights when I can’t sleep, when the clock tortures me and the dark bends my thoughts into weird shapes, I get to thinking ... What if deep down I really am bad?” (page 23). How are right and wrong presented in the novel? Are some characters (for example, Libby, Rachel, Michael or Mr Stokes) presented purely as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or are there shades of grey?
2. Do you think Melati does the right thing by keeping what she finds in the diary mostly to herself? How could the story have unfolded differently if she had told the authorities?
3. Did you have any preconceived ideas about Indonesia before reading *The Hidden Girl* and if so, why? What you learn about the country and its culture from the book? Have you been to Indonesia, or would you like to?
4. “They’re in my corner, but there’s a sour taste in my mouth. It’s that word. Brave. A lonely trophy of a word. I think of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Joan of Arc. What did bravery do for them? They’re dead, dead, dead. Dead like my school record. They’re calling me brave, but deep down they mean stupid: Thanks for being stupid enough to do what we should have done,” (page 28). Do you think Melati taking on Libby was brave, or stupid, or perhaps both? Do you agree with Melati’s take on what bravery means? How would you define it?
5. What do we learn about Devi as a character through the diary? Do you think the voice that comes through is authentic to who she is? Why or why not? Have you ever kept a diary? What impression do you think someone could form of you from only reading your entries?
6. Devi’s experience of human trafficking and trying to get justice is confronting. What was it like to read about what Devi went through, from her own perspective? Were you surprised to learn this practice is prevalent in Australia? As a group, have a discussion about what is being done to both stop human trafficking and to provide support for people who have had experiences like Devi.
7. Did you find yourself mostly agreeing or disagreeing with Melati’s decisions throughout the book? Why or why not? Were there any of her choices you found yourself on the fence about?
8. How is the theme of fear explored in the novel through both Devi and Melati? What are some of the things these characters are afraid of, for themselves and for their futures?
9. “I’ve got friends I’ve known for years and anytime it comes up, or gets close to it, they do the big swerve,” (page 160). Michael expresses to Melati how talking about tough topics, in his case his mother’s death, makes people uncomfortable even though it’s helpful for him to be able to discuss it. Can you relate to this? Why do you think it’s important to not do ‘the big swerve’ with friends and family when things get difficult?
10. Melati struggles with controlling her feelings of anger. How does she work to improve on this? How does she change as a character as a result of the events of the novel?
11. How does *The Hidden Girl* compare to other Australian YA you might have read? You could especially consider Melati’s narrative voice, the plot, or the novel’s school setting. If you haven’t read much Australian YA, check out #LoveOzYA for lots more recommendations!