



Book Club Discussion Questions

The Widow by Fiona Barton

1. Discuss the structure of the book and why the author chose to write the story in this way. What is the effect of alternating between the perspectives of the Widow, the Reporter, the Detective and the Mother? How did this narrative structure impact your reading of the novel and your opinions about the various characters and events?
2. Discuss the character of Jean. What were your initial impressions of her? Do you think the image she presented was sincere? Why or why not? Did your opinions about her change as the novel unfolded. If so, how?
3. What do you think finally pushed Jean into telling her story? Do you think she wanted to tell her story all along? If so, what held her back?
4. What did you think of Kate's investigative methods? How does her presence in the story affect how it unfolds? Do you think the media help or hinder the police during crime investigations? Give some examples from the book to illustrate your points.
5. Discuss Jean and Glen-separately and together as a couple. How would you describe the quality of their relationship? Did your feelings about Jean change as you learned more about her and her marriage to Glen?
6. Bella's disappearance captivated the public's attention. Why do you think people were so interested in this crime and the people involved? Do you think society's morbid fascination with this crime helped or hurt the investigation? How do you think our fascination with these types of crimes affects real-life investigations?

7. Jean harbors a lot of anger toward Bella's mother, Dawn Elliott, and repeatedly accuses her of being a "bad mother" throughout the book. It's one of the rare instances where Jean gets worked up and outwardly emotional. Why do you think her reaction to Dawn is so strong? After learning about more about Dawn, do you agree with Jean?

8. Do you think Jean was as ignorant about her husband's actions as she claimed to be? Why do you think that she stood by him through the investigation and trial? If you were in her shoes, what would you have done? What might you have done differently?

9. Discuss the role that addiction and obsession play in the novel. How are the characters defined by their addictions and obsessions, and how do they drive their actions?

10. Do you think the unorthodox method of investigation-posing undercover in an Internet chat room to befriend and expose their suspect-employed by Detective Sparkes and his team was justified? Do you think they should have tried to find a link in another way? Or do you think that the ends justify the means in some cases?

11. This novel poses some difficult questions about moral choices, as the lines between guilt and innocence are repeatedly blurred. Do you think Jean is justified in doing any of the things she does throughout the book? If so, which ones?

12. Jean is not always completely truthful. How reliable is she as a narrator? Identify moments where you trusted her and moments where you doubted her. What techniques does the author use to make Jean seem both reliable and unreliable at various points in the novel?

13. Discuss the story's ending. Were you surprised by Jean's revelations? Did you think that the ending would turn out the way that it did? If not, what didn't you see coming?

14. What do you think will happen to the Widow, the Reporter, the Detective and the Mother? How do you think the revelations at the end will impact each of their lives?

15. What was your emotional reaction to *The Widow*? Would you call it a page-turner, and, if so, how does the author ratchet up the suspense? Discuss specific moments that were jarring for you as a reader and how the author kept you on edge.

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