

SUZANNE DO

READING
GROUP
NOTES

'Some books howl and some books weep and some books soar inside your soul. *The Golden Sister* does all three. Utterly beguiling'

TRENT DALTON

'Heartbreaking'

MARIAN KEYES

'The kind of book that ... stays with you long after you've closed it'

HOLLY WAINWRIGHT

THE GOLDEN SISTER



Blurb

A twin sister's death, a lost child, a coastal community that's not always close-knit – introducing the book that will warm your soul as it breaks your heart.

Lili Berry is busy curating a life for herself in the charming coastal village of Swanning, before the death of her twin sister, Honey, upends everything.

A devastated Lili sets out to discover the cause of Honey's death, finding relief from her raw grief amid a flurry of investigative activity.

Pete, a cultivated man who seems to live on the streets, has his own tragedy to bear: the disappearance of his little boy fifteen years ago.

When Lili learns Pete was the one who found her sister's body, the two of them plunge head-first into a web of secrets and lies, before emerging to confront the shocking truth.

Achingly funny and heartbreakingly sad, *The Golden Sister* celebrates the intensity of families, the solace of unexpected friendships and the all-consuming messiness of love.

About Suzanne Do

Suzanne Do is an Australian writer and former lawyer. She co-wrote the feature film, *Footy Legends*, as well as the award-winning children's book, *The Little Refugee*. Suzanne lives with her husband, four children and two dogs on the south coast of New South Wales. *The Golden Sister* is her first novel.



Photo credit: Jeremy Park

Discussion Questions

1. Lili and Honey were identical twins, except they seem to have been quite different from one another. From what you learn of their upbringing in this novel, why do you think they might have grown into such different people?
2. How does the setting of *The Golden Sister* – the small fictional Australian coastal town of Swanning, and its larger neighbour, Portdale, in a hot, stormy summer – contribute to the overall mood and themes of the book?
3. What are the key events that influence Lili's journey through the novel? How do they change her – or force her to change – and what is the effect of this on Lili and the people around her, do you think?
4. In what ways do Lili's relationships with her family and peers impact her actions and decisions in the story? Do you think she would have befriended Pete in any other circumstances?
5. What role does the theme of identity play in the novel? Consider particularly Lili's cultural background, and the tragic events in Pete's past.
6. Discuss the significance of Honey's character and how her presence (or absence) influences the Berry family dynamic, and the plot in general.
7. How does the author use symbolism in the novel, particularly concerning objects like the grass rabbit and the sea dragon (and the other objects on Lili's bookshelf), or Lili's notebook?
8. How is the theme of home, shelter and belonging explored through Lili's and Pete's interactions with their environment and the people around them?
9. What insights does the novel offer about family dynamics and personal relationships, in your opinion?
10. Swimming becomes very important to Lili as the novel progresses. Why do you think this is? What is it about swimming that provides a bridge between Lili and Pete, and Lili and Maz?
11. How does the book address themes of jealousy and possession, firstly in regard to Honey's past romantic relationships, and secondly in regard to the relationship between Lili and Honey? What impact does Lili's perception that Honey is superior to her in nearly every way have on Lili's life?
12. What narrative techniques does the author use to build suspense or develop the plot?
13. How does the author portray mental health and the emotional struggles of the characters? Which of the characters cope with these issues well, and which do not? Why do you think this is?
14. Discuss the significance of the novel's title – what does 'The Golden Sister' represent within the story? Why do you think the author chose these words?
15. How does the book explore the idea of past versus present, of what was and what might have been, and how do these ideas affect Lili's journey?
16. In what ways does humour play a role in the book, and how does it affect the overall tone?

- 17.** Maz's dog Chupa Chup provides both light relief in the plot and a point of connection between Maz and Lili. Dogs are also important to Pete, and an episode with Monty the French bulldog impacts Lili's relationship with potential house buyers, the Taylors. Discuss the positive role animals can play in people's lives, and the effect this can have.
- 18.** How do themes of loss and grief manifest in Lili's actions and thoughts?
- 19.** Lili works hard but is often on the outer in her workplace. What are the reasons for this, do you think?
- 20.** What elements of the author's writing style stand out the most to you, and how do they enhance the story?
- 21.** How does the climax of the novel tie together the story's themes and character arcs? What do you think will happen next?