The image shows two children hanging upside down from a grassy edge at the top of the frame. They are silhouetted against a bright, golden sunset sky with scattered clouds. The child on the left has long hair and is wearing a dark top and shorts. The child on the right is wearing a light-colored dress. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

The Other Side of the World

BY STEPHANIE BISHOP
READING GROUP QUESTIONS

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1. 'Is it easier to love a child, she wonders, than it is to love a wife?' How do you think Henry and Charlotte's relationship has been changed by the arrival of children? How might Charlotte's sense of failure as a mother have affected her relationship with Henry? Do you think the traditional demarcation of roles between mother and father is harmful or beneficial to a couple and their children?
2. 'In his mind he sees a kind of paradise: sunlight, blue sky, pineapple and steak, golf and tennis.' What do you think Australia represents today to immigrants? Do you think this reflects the truth of life in Australia?
3. 'So, where did you say you're from?' Do you think the experience of the non-European migrant is still different from that of the European migrant to Australia? In what ways?
4. Henry's ethnicity is never discussed directly between the couple. Why do you think this is? Do you think Charlotte has any understanding of Henry's experience as an Anglo-Indian in England, and then in Australia?
5. How much have attitudes towards race changed in Australia since the 1960s? How much of a role do you think immigration has played in this?
6. 'Nostalgia ... is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed' (Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*). Whether as migrants or just looking back over our lives, how clearly do we see past times and places? How does this affect our attitude towards the present? For what do you feel nostalgic?
7. 'He wonders what it would be like to belong somewhere and never doubt it. To not be constantly pestered by the knowledge of your own foreignness.' Does the book's depiction of the experience of migration echo or change your own viewpoint on this issue? How would you cope if you emigrated to the other side of the world, or to a very different country? What advantages and disadvantages do you see to the experience of being a migrant? If you are an immigrant, how has the experience changed you?
8. 'It would make life easier to feel this – to feel real affection for this new place ... But she is afraid – without clear reason – that it would necessarily lessen her feelings for home. As if there were only so much affection, so much loyalty, to be portioned out. It is the same kind of fear, she realises, that she felt when pregnant with May.'

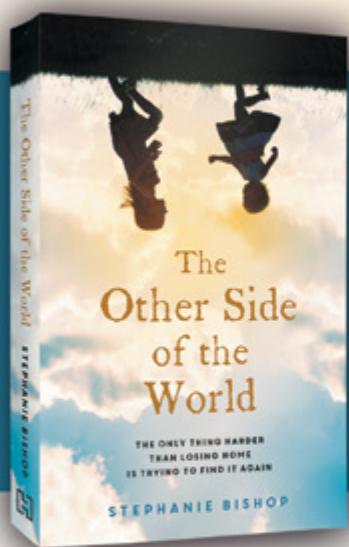
Would she have enough love for a second child? Would it mean giving up some of the love for her first? How mad that seems now – the foolishness of not seeing, not knowing, that such love simply doubles, triples, quadruples as required.'

What do you make of this comparison between love for children and love for a country? Do you agree that 'such love simply doubles, triples, quadruples as required' or do you think some 'lessening' of love is inevitable?

9. 'How right that our experience should evolve and that our children's experience should move in ever wider circles than our own,' thinks Henry. How do you feel about this idea? Has this been your own and your family's experience?
10. Weather plays a key role in the book. Both Henry and Charlotte struggle with living in a climate different from the one in which they spent their childhood, and long for weather that feels familiar. How much do you think our experience of the weather affects our sense of belonging? How much do you think our climate 'setpoint' can be changed by later exposure to different environments? How important is living in a particular climate to you?
11. Workplace discrimination and bullying are today recognised as significant issues. What options do you think Henry had for responding to Collins's treatment of him in 1965? What would you have done in his place?
12. '... it is difficult ... marriage,' Nicholas says to Charlotte. What do you think of the newspaper clipping on marriage that Charlotte's mother gives her? Do you think Iris is being hypocritical, or do you think she believes that following this advice will make Charlotte happy? To what extent do you think our approach to marriage and parenting can reflect our own sense of personal failure?
13. 'The seed of the end is planted in the beginning.' How much do you think *The Other Side of the World* illustrates this? Is this your own experience of past relationships?
14. 'What she wants, she realises, is a witness to her life. Someone who can affirm what is true. She is thinking of the doubt that has grown between her and Henry, how neither of them believes the other's story, the other's version of historical truth ... There is something impoverishing about this mutual mistrust, this mutual suspicion – something mean, and they do not know how to rise above it.'
What do you think are Henry's and Charlotte's underlying beliefs about relationships and communication? How might different attitudes and communication styles have affected their relationship? What role do you think partners should play in each other's life?
15. At different times we see Charlotte ignoring, smacking and abandoning her children. How did you feel towards her during these scenes? Do you think there is more

understanding today of the pressures parents (and particularly mothers) of small children are under? Is there more or less support, particularly for migrant women? How do you feel about Henry's involvement in the life of the family?

16. What do you think are the main reasons behind Charlotte's decision to leave Australia? How much do you think she understands herself of this decision? What do you think she is planning to do when she returns? Does she see it as permanent or temporary?
17. Society has traditionally judged women who leave their children more harshly than men who do. How compellingly does *The Other Side of the World* present possible reasons why a woman might go?
18. Henry says that he realised the truth when he dreamed about Charlotte touching Nicholas's face. What do you think he understood in that moment? Do you believe that dreams can reveal truths our conscious mind can't yet see or face? Has this happened to you?
19. What decision do you think Charlotte has come to at the end of the book? Why? How did you feel about the way their story ended?
20. To inform the novel, Stephanie Bishop has drawn on aspects of her grandparents' experience as migrants to Australia. How significant are family stories in your own life? To what extent do they focus on your ancestors' experiences of migration?



**THE ONLY THING HARDER
THAN LOSING HOME
IS TRYING TO FIND IT AGAIN**