

The Carrier

Reading Group Questions

- 1) Which of the characters in the book is most responsible for the death of Francine Breary? Do you think the person who physically killed her is the person most guilty of murder?
- 2) Do you agree with Kerry Jose that ‘a tyrant is someone whose death would liberate somebody, even if it’s only one person?’ Does it make sense to talk of tyrants in the domestic sphere, or is ‘tyrant’ a label that sounds more political? Is there a difference between a bully and a tyrant? Is Francine a psychological tyrant, and if so, how does her particular kind of tyranny work? What hold does she have over the other characters in the novel?
- 3) Gaby and Sean’s relationship is not a happy one. How has it ended up in such a bad state? Do you think either Gaby or Sean is more to blame for this, or were they simply incompatible from the start?
- 4) Who matters more to Tim Breary, Francine or Gaby?
- 5) Is there any sense in which Francine’s murder could be seen as a mercy killing, or does/should that concept only apply to cases of terminal illness and/or extreme physical pain?
- 6) When Gaby and Lauren first meet at the airport, it’s fair to say that they don’t get on very well. How does their relationship change over the course of the book?
- 7) Charlie and Simon become entangled in the problems of the Proust family in this book, which leads Charlie to worry that her relationship with Simon might be as dysfunctional as Proust and his wife Lizzie’s marriage – is there any truth in this? How does one measure whether a relationship is healthy or unhealthy?
- 8) At the end of the novel, were you surprised by Gaby’s decision with regard to Tim? What do you think will happen between Gaby and Tim after the end of the book? What do you think should happen? Did you find this aspect of the end of the book too unresolved/ambiguous? Would you have liked a more definite resolution?
- 9) How did you feel about the role played by poetry in the book?
- 10) Olivia, Charlie’s sister, has a strange philosophy with regard to romantic infidelity. She believes that lying in order to keep everyone happy for as long as possible, so that you can sustain your double life and maximise the personal fulfilment of everyone involved, is the best way forward – better than either ending one’s affair or leaving one’s spouse for one’s lover. Do you agree with her? Why, or why not?

11) Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie is referred to several times in the book? Why do you think this is (apart from that the author is an Agatha Christie fan?!). Is there any link or thematic connection between the solution to this murder mystery and the solution in Murder on the Orient Express?

12) Money is a character, a theme and a motive in The Carrier, though in a very unconventional way. Discuss.

13) This is a novel about what happens when human beings unreasonably impose upon one another, both in major and minor ways. Do you agree? Is it inevitable that people will impose on those close to them in ways that will sometimes be unpleasant, or is it simply that the characters in this particular book don't know how to behave properly?

14) For how long is it reasonable to hold a person responsible for past bad behaviour? Is it fair to think of Francine, after her stroke, as the same woman she was before her stroke? Should Tim, Kerry and Dan have forgiven Francine as soon as she became the helpless victim of her own ill health?

15) When Simon expresses his shock and disgust, at the end of the novel, about what was done to Francine Breary, did you, as a reader, experience any kind of 'parallax view' feeling? Did you feel suddenly feel differently about Francine or the other characters, or see anything differently from how you'd seen it up to that point?