

The Other Half Lives

Reading Group Questions

- 1) Is Ruth a sympathetic character? How does she develop and grow over the course of the book?
- 2) Is Ruth's relationship with Aidan a healthy one, or is it dysfunctional?
- 3) To what extent are the characters in *The Other Half Lives* responsible for the bad things that happen to them?
- 4) Lots of the characters are keeping secrets, or withholding something. How much is the book about people's inability to communicate with one another?
- 5) Are any of the characters in the book evil, or are they simply so badly damaged that they can't help harming others?
- 6) What is the book saying about the power of art to make life better? Can a work of art be great even if the artist who made it is a bad person?
- 7) Mary Trelease believes Aidan has ruined her life, and he believes she has ruined his. Is one of them right and the other wrong, or are both their truths equally valid?
- 8) In what way is this a story about forgiveness? Do the characters find it harder to forgive themselves or others?
- 9) Religion plays a part in the novel – Evangelical Christianity and Quakerism. What role does religion play in the characters' lives?
- 10) There are characters in the novel from the privileged upper classes, and working class characters too – what is the novel saying about crime and social class?
- 11) Simon Waterhouse and Charlie Zailer, the main police characters in the book, have a difficult and tense relationship. Does this hinder them in their attempts to work out what's going on between Ruth, Aidan and Mary, or does it help them?