

# Reading Group Questions

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## SUMMARY

*The Back Road* is a story of ordinary people, with ordinary deceptions in their lives. Commonplace as some of the behaviours are, it doesn't make them right, or admirable. And of course, there is a catalyst amongst them whose secrets are much darker - far beyond anything that can be considered 'normal'. It is this catalyst that shatters the thin veneer of respectability that so many of the characters hide behind.

Each person in the story makes decisions that can impact on others, not realising that by persisting with their lies and deceit they are helping a child abductor and ultimately a killer to wreak havoc in their community.

*The Back Road* is a tale of stalking in its varied forms, revealing some of the many dangers of social media, whilst exploring the threat imposed by obsessive behaviour. Many of the less pleasant aspects of human nature are displayed, but it is only in the final chapters that the true depths of deception are revealed.

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## DISCUSSION POINTS

1. One of this novel's key characteristics is the way it portrays a number of complex relationships, and explores the motivations of individuals within the story.
  - Do you believe that Leo's attitude to her father was justified? Should her anger have been directed at his past behaviour and bigamous life, or at his treatment of her as she grew up?
  - How would you characterise Ellie's mother's attitude towards Leo? Was this understandable?
  - Ellie strives to discover what happened to her father, unable to believe that he would just have left her without a word of goodbye. To what extent do you believe this quest impacts on her relationship with Max?
2. When Ellie believes that Max is having an affair, she makes a number of choices. She is almost unfaithful with Sean, and she decides to keep quiet about her suspicions. What other options did she have, and what might have been the outcome?
3. Abbie Campbell's mother believes that she did everything to protect Abbie. She checked out the party venue, and Abbie had a mobile phone. Is there anything else that she could have done to ensure her daughter was safe, given the circumstances and the age of her daughter (14)?

4. When Pat's wife discovered his affair, she threw him out and he went straight to Mimi's house. What other options could either of them have chosen that might have resulted in a different outcome?
5. When Ellie starts to receive the yellow roses – a sign from Sean that he is watching her – what advice would you have given to Ellie as her friend?
6. Abbie Campbell is traced and followed because of her Facebook account. Once friended, her stalker can find out everything about her, and pretend to be anybody she wants to be. What steps should be taken to ensure that the very real danger of this type of stalking (digitally enhanced stalking) is reduced?
7. Max has made several mistakes. He has helped Alannah to disguise her drug problem and promised to keep this from Ellie. What other options did he have, and what might have been alternative outcomes?
8. Mimi has installed a stalking app on Patrick's telephone. She wants to know where he is, and to control everybody that he speaks to. How commonplace do you think these apps are, and given that he's been lying to her, how justified is she in tracking him in this way?
9. Do you believe that Mimi would have killed Abbie in the hospital if she hadn't been interrupted? Discuss her motives and what she hoped to gain.
10. In the final chapter, we learn the secret that Fiona has been harbouring for years, and Leo is faced with the truth about her father. Not only was he a rapist, but he also raped his daughter's friend. At what point should Leo share this information with Ellie?
11. Tom has become close to Leo during the course of the events in Little Melham. Where would you like to see the relationship between them go to next, or should they both go their separate ways?
12. Which character's actions did you find you had the most sympathy with, and whom did you dislike the most?