

Reading Guide for

Salt Upon the Water

1. Throughout the novel, seemingly magical occurrences take place at unexpected moments, often relating to seals, mermaids, and selkies. How do these events contribute to our understanding of the characters, their experiences, and concerns?
2. Discuss the relationship between Clarissa and Light. What draws them together? Are they right to travel to France and Italy without informing Clarissa's family? What does the conflict between them reveal about race, gender, and power?
3. Clarissa and Light both demonstrate a keen awareness of the presence of First Nations people in South Australia. What do the characters' respective attitudes towards the settlement of South Australia reveal about them?
4. Discuss the characters of Moses and Judith. What is their significance to the story, and to the lives of Clarissa and Light? What do you think it means when Judith tosses Clarissa's dress into the sea, and seemingly appears to Light at the very end of the novel?
5. Family, heritage, and identity are large elements of both Clarissa and Light's desires and fears. What do their different responses to these drivers tell you about how multiracial heritage might have been experienced in the past?

6. Water, islands, and coastal zones are significant physical locations in the novel. What role does the natural world play in *Salt Upon the Water*? How does water and coastal-based imagery shape our understanding of the novel's themes?
7. While *Salt Upon the Water* is a work of fiction, William Light is a real historical person. What does it mean for Australia's national identity that one of Australia's capital cities was designed by a man of Asian heritage? In what ways was William Light a perpetrator of colonisation? Was he also a victim? What does his complex legacy mean for discussions about the future of Australian identity?
8. Over the course of the novel, Clarissa and Light discuss the ways that society is changing, moving from a more liberal and tolerant world in the Regency period to an increasingly rigid and discriminatory one in the Victoria era. Does this cultural change surprise you? What relevance does it have for our own time period?
9. *Salt Upon the Water* is described as an 'alternate history'. As a work of historical fiction, in what ways does the novel speak to the past as well as our present?
10. Despite her connection to Light, Clarissa ultimately leaves him and Australia to marry her English fiancé and travel to Siam (now Thailand). What is the significance of Clarissa's choice? Was this outcome inevitable? Do you see it as a romantic or political decision?
11. At various points in the novel, both central characters experience adversity and discrimination, yet they also each develop a strong sense of hope. How do feelings of hope influence them? Do you think the end of the novel is a hopeful one? Why/why not?