

Reading Group Questions: Helen Kitson's *The Last Words of Madeleine Anderson*

"I mean, it's definitely one of those grey areas, ethically speaking." Do you agree with Simon's statement when referring to Gabrielle claiming authorship of Madeleine's novel?

Gabrielle remembers Maddie as a "golden person". From what we see of Maddie in the book, how far do you agree with her?

Neither Gabrielle nor Simon is particularly likeable and they are both deeply flawed. Do you find them relatable and is this more or less important than whether or not the reader likes them?

The novel contains many references to books and writers, in particular Barbara Pym. What points of similarity can you see between this story and those of Pym's?

The ending of the story is ambiguous. We learn that Gabrielle can swim, but does that make her a murderer? On balance, how responsible do you feel she was for Maddie's death?

If the story has a moral or a message, what do you think it might be?

How do you see the roles of Viv, Lisel and Mr Latham in the book? Which of these characters do you think is the most useful to Gabrielle in shaking her out of the rut she was in?

Gabrielle thinks Simon will either "drift through life" or do "the sensible thing" and go back to university. Which of these do you think is more likely?

"Didn't most people simply bumble through their lives, ticking over, aiming not for greatness or even happiness, but simply trying to get by?" How far do you agree with Gabrielle?

How far is the behaviour of the central characters affected by their relationship with their parents? Do parents get a raw deal in this novel?

Loneliness and sexual attraction lead Gabrielle to accept Simon into her life with few qualms. Do you think she is too naïve or do you understand her motivations?

What lessons has Gabrielle had to learn, and do you think her experiences with Simon have changed her for the better?

Simon notes that writers are advised to give their worst characters a redeeming feature, "even if it's only that they love their pet Jack Russell or never kill spiders". What redeeming features do you think Gabrielle and Simon have?