Some topics to consider while reading *A History of the Beanbag*:

- Life in suburbia
- The ordinary and the everyday
- Racism and cultural awareness
- Friendships and relationships
- How we are defined by the choices we make

*A History of the Beanbag* is a short story collection with a difference – a scenic tour of the surprises, secrets and fears beneath the cracked veneer of domesticity and suburban complacency. With photographic precision, Susan Midalia captures the fleeting beauty, light and darkness to be found in the ephemera of everyday life.

Like the beanbag of the title, the stories are an invitation to settle yourself in for a reading experience by turns vivid, haunting, bizarre and strangely confronting.

About Susan Midalia

Susan Midalia has taught English at tertiary and secondary levels. She also has a PhD in contemporary Australian women’s fiction. Her first collection of short stories, *A History of the Beanbag* (2007), was shortlisted for the Western Australian Premier’s Book Award. She now works full-time as a writer and editor and conducts workshops on the short story. She lives in Perth, and is married with two adult sons.
Discussion questions

1. ‘Annie’s parents tried to laugh away this incident, this moment in her childhood when they were not there, when so much was disturbing and inexplicably wrong’ (p. 20). How does this sentence from ‘Freeze frame’ make you feel?

2. What do you think is happening to the character Silvia in ‘It’s only words’ when she falls into ‘a very different kind of illness’.

3. Many of the stories in the book explore character interactions with Indigenous Australians. Can you relate to any of these characters? Is the author imparting a message in any of these stories?

4. How does the author position us as readers to feel about the character's father in ‘A voice in the dark’? What does this achieve at the end of the story?

5. ‘All this she had; so much, so gleaming and so achingly unreal’ (p. 66). What does this last line from ‘Somewhere else’ mean to you?

6. Some of the stories examine the role of grandparents and the significance they have in their families. Discuss your relationship with your own grandparents. Why are they so significant?

7. ‘Halfway through the nightmare’ is an evocative title. What type of image does this title evoke for you?

8. What is the significance of the meteor flashing past the narrator in ‘Meteor Man’? Does this change the character in anyway?

9. Can you relate to, or do you know of anyone that reminds you of the character Grace in ‘A comedy of manners’? What is your opinion of people like her?

10. ‘Put on your dancing shoes’ shows that it is never too late to make yourself happy. Do you think there was anyway Stan could make himself happy again?