



Some topics to consider while reading *Extinctions*:

- Parenting
- Grief and loss
- Ageing
- Forgiveness and healing
- Marriage

EXTINCTIONS

by Josephine Wilson

He hated the word 'retirement', but not as much as he hated the word 'village', as if ageing made you a peasant or a fool. Herein lives the village idiot.

Professor Frederick Lothian, retired engineer, world expert on concrete and connoisseur of modernist design, has quarantined himself from life by moving to a retirement village. His wife, Martha, is dead and his two adult children are lost to him in their own ways. Surrounded and obstructed by the debris of his life – objects he has collected over many years and tells himself he is keeping for his daughter – he is determined to be miserable, but is tired of his existence and of the life he has chosen.

When a series of unfortunate incidents forces him and his neighbour, Jan, together, he begins to realise the damage done by the accumulation of a lifetime's secrets and lies, and to comprehend his own shortcomings. Finally, Frederick Lothian has the opportunity to build something meaningful for the ones he loves.



Josephine Wilson was the winner of the inaugural 2015 Dorothy Hewett Award for an unpublished Manuscript. for her novel *Extinctions*.

Her first novel, *Cusp*, was published by UWA Publishing in 2005.

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Discussion Questions

- 1 *Extinctions* gradually reveals to the reader a number of secrets about Katie and Virgil, Martha's marriage and Callum's situation. How does each of these events and their aftermath alter your perception of Frederick?
- 2 As we read the novel we come to understand that the marriage of Martha and Frederick was troubled. In what ways is Frederick a product of the time in which he grew up? How has marriage changed?
- 3 When Ralph's daughter Katie runs away to Sydney, Frederick does not reach out to support Ralph because "men don't like people prying into their private lives" (p.18). Do you think this perception that 'real men' mourn alone and in silence is becoming more or less common in contemporary Australia?
- 4 *Extinctions* is interspersed with a number of evocative photographs. In what ways do the photographs enhance or expand on the text?
- 5 As the novel draws to a close, Frederick seeks to rectify his mistakes and renew his relationship with his son. Do you believe that family relationships are ever beyond repair?
- 6 Frederick is a faintly unlikeable protagonist. What makes his narration so compelling to read?
- 7 Frederick's blossoming relationship with Janet causes him to see events from his past in a new light. When was the last time you looked back on something and re-evaluated its significance to you?
- 8 When discussing her *Extinctions* exhibition with Frederick, Caroline says "we live on an anxious planet, Dad" (p.125). What do you think Caroline means by this?
- 9 *Extinctions* suggests that there are many kinds of making a family, and of caring for each other. Do you believe this is true of modern Australia?
- 10 Has reading *Extinctions* changed your understanding of the experience of adoption? If so, in what ways?