Some topics to consider while reading *Great Western Highway*:

- Capitalism
- Love and modern relationships
- Advertising and consumerism
- Media and the digital age
- Economics and politics

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**GREAT WESTERN HIGHWAY**

A Love Story (Capital, Volume One, Part Two)

by Anthony Macris

Thirty-something Nick is walking down Parramatta Road’s six lanes of thundering traffic to see his former girlfriend Penny for the first time since they agreed to be ‘just friends’. By the novel’s end, he is racing back up that same road so he doesn’t lose her. Nick and Penny’s awkward romance is played out against the backdrop of high capitalism and the rise of the digital age. Bombarded by advertisements, slogans, news, wars, politics and consumerism, just a little silence is hard to find. Even in the bedroom with the woman he wants so much to love, Nick’s mind spirals off to other times and places.

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**About Anthony Macris**

Anthony Macris is an Australian writer and Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Technology, Sydney. His first novel in the Capital series, *Capital, Volume One*, was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize (Southeast Asian section) Best First Book 1998. Anthony is also the author of *When Horse Became Saw*, his family’s inspirational story and a powerful evocation of the world of autism.
Discussion questions

1. In the novel’s opening chapter, while standing at the ATM, Nick is presented with numerous advertisements that depict scenes of happy couples moving through the stages of life together. Nick ponders ‘How could you call yourself human and not be moved by images like these?’ (p. 11). Are we conditioned by the capitalist world we inhabit to live an ‘ideal’ life?

2. What do you think of Nick and Penny as characters? Did you find yourself connecting more with one particular character than the other?

3. How does the author present the world of advertising in the novel? Did this make you think more about the effect advertising has on you?

4. How does Nick perceive the messages of competition and consumption found in the advertisements and shop fronts that surround him during his walk along Parramatta Road?

5. In ‘Roses all the way’, we are led through the internal monologue of Margaret Thatcher. Why do you think the author has chosen to write this chapter in a stream-of-consciousness style? Is it effective?

6. ‘Most of them didn’t have a spine to raise children the self-discipline to go the long haul and those who have managed to raise a family if you can call it that have raised an equally dissolute generation’ (p. 180). In your opinion, do the characters in Great Western Highway represent a ‘dissolute generation’?

7. What does the stretch of Parramatta Road that separates Nick and Penny represent?

8. Great Western Highway is structured using different points of view: part one is written in the third person, whereas parts two, three and four use the first person and the second person. How do the different points of view affect you as a reader?

9. What is the significance of the various screens that feature throughout the novel – from the ATM screen in the opening chapter to the pervasive war coverage witnessed by Nick on his rented television in London? Do we as readers become ‘consumers’ by viewing the world of the novel through these screens?

10. Macris writes in the ‘Author’s Note’ that love has been ‘harnessed to serve the needs of capitalism’ (p. 347). To what extent do you agree/disagree with this statement?