

Bay of Fires

By Poppy Gee

(Little, Brown; Headline Review; Hachette Australia, 2013)

‘It was the day after Boxing Day when the fisherman found the body. The sun had barely surfaced over the ocean horizon. The crisp sand, littered with marine debris, gleamed in the day’s freshness....
The fisherman’s were the only footprints on the beach.’

Bay of Fires is Poppy Gee’s debut novel. It is set on the east coast of Tasmania, a remote area deep in a national park, accessed by one road, and surrounded by ocean. It is a murder-mystery, a love story, an exploration of human frailty and endurance, and a celebration of nature.

BAY OF FIRES Discussion Questions

1. Sarah is a divisive character, engaging or repelling readers. What was your feeling about her, and why did this differ from your fellow readers?
2. There is a contrast between the rugged, pristine environment of Tasmania, and the fertile, verdant imagery of tropical Queensland where Sarah worked on the barramundi farm. How do these landscapes reflect Sarah's state of mind?
3. Sarah is a tough woman. At what point, if at all, did you warm to her? Should characters be ‘likable’?
4. It can be thought that the way people have sex reflects something of their relationship and the politics between them. How was the first sex scene in the guesthouse handled, in this respect? How does this compare to other books you have read?
5. Traditionally in literature, single women have occupied a lesser role in the narrative: often the spinster figure was reviled, ridiculed, or marginalised. The author aspired to make single women more integral to the plot in Bay of Fires. How do you see this happening in this novel?
6. Sarah has a drinking problem and several dramatic scenes in the novel are fueled by alcohol. Is this a realistic depiction of the effect of alcohol in our society?

7. Several times Hall must decide between filing a sensational news story or keeping private information Sarah has given to him. His final choice is testing. What would you do?
8. What are some of these incidences of casual cruelty between people in this novel? Why do the characters behave in this way? Is it ever justifiable?
9. There are also examples of human kindness – what were some of these that stand out?
10. What other books did this one remind you of?