



# Reading Group Guide

This free guide to *Unravelling* by Lindsay Stanberry-Flynn is available for reading groups. The guide contains discussion topics and background to the book.

## About the author

Lindsay Stanberry-Flynn was born in London and studied in Liverpool, before becoming a lecturer in English. She wrote her first stories as a child. After leaving full-time teaching, she took an MA in creative writing at Bath Spa University. Lindsay has written a number of novels but *Unravelling* was the first to be published. It has won a number of awards. Her next novel *The Piano Player's Son* was published in 2013 by Cinnamon Press.



## Background to *Unravelling*

I wrote *Unravelling* because I wanted to explore the concept of a love that survives a lifetime, despite separation, estrangement and betrayal. Its early title was *All That Remains* from the notion that whatever life throws at us, what counts in the end – what ‘remains’ – is love.

I was interested in the idea taken from Plato’s *Symposium* that humans were once made up of two halves, one female, one male. The gods, out of jealousy, split them in two, and now we spend our lives looking for our other half, our ‘soul mate’. It’s an idea that’s prevalent in modern culture and perhaps an ideal we all yearn for.

When I read an article about someone’s parents who remarried aged 58 and 73, having first eloped in the 1960s, the love affair at the heart of *Unravelling* was born.

*Unravelling* is different because it explores the contrasts between ‘young’ love and ‘old’ love, between passionate, dangerous love and quiet, secure love. It considers the forces that shape love at different times in our lives. While it is a novel about love, with a powerful love affair, passionate characters and an involving plot, it is not a romantic novel in the accepted sense.

## Ideas for discussion

1. What does the book have to say about love? What differences are there in the novel between 'young' love and 'old' love?
2. What is there about Vanessa and Gerald's love that makes it survive divorce, estrangement and tragedy?
3. What do you learn about the 1960s' era from *Unravelling*?
4. How does the present-day Vanessa compare with Vanessa in the past? In what ways does her character evolve?
5. What is the effect of the time switches in the novel?
6. Do you find Gerald a monster or a magnetic character?
7. Whose point of view is more compelling – Vanessa's or Cordelia's? Which of the two stories involved you more?
8. Which of the three main male characters, Gerald, Andrew or Patrick, do you find most interesting and why?
9. Does Gerald deserve Vanessa's complete rejection of him after the accident?
10. Do you understand why Cordelia refuses to meet her father when he finally returns?
11. How much sympathy do you feel for Jake when he attacks Gerald?
12. How convincing is Patrick's secret?
13. In what ways does Charles Miller differ from Gerald? Do you think Vanessa should pursue a relationship with him?
14. How do you see Esme's role in the novel?
15. Three generations of women are portrayed in *Unravelling* – Vanessa, Cordelia and Savannah. What are the similarities and differences between them?
16. Do you find the ending of *Unravelling* emotionally satisfying?
17. What do you think *Unravelling* is saying about the balance of power in male/female relationships?
18. Do you think Vanessa is right to blame herself ultimately for the tragedy at the heart of the novel?

*Unravelling* is published by Matador, ISBN 9781848763517,  
and is available from bookshops, online booksellers and libraries.

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