

Reading Group Guide




Portsmouth, 1984. Thirteen-year-old Jake's world is unravelling as his father and older brother leave home, and his mother, Mary, plunges into alcoholic freefall.

Despite his turbulent home life, Jake is an irrepressible teenager and his troubled mother is not the only thing on his mind: there's the hi-fi he's saving up for, his growing passion for Greek mythology (and his pretty classics teacher), and the anticipation of brief visits to see his dad. When his parents reconcile, life finally seems to be looking up. Their first family holiday, announced over scampi and chips in the Royal Oak, promises to be the icing on the cake – until long-unspoken family secrets begin to surface.

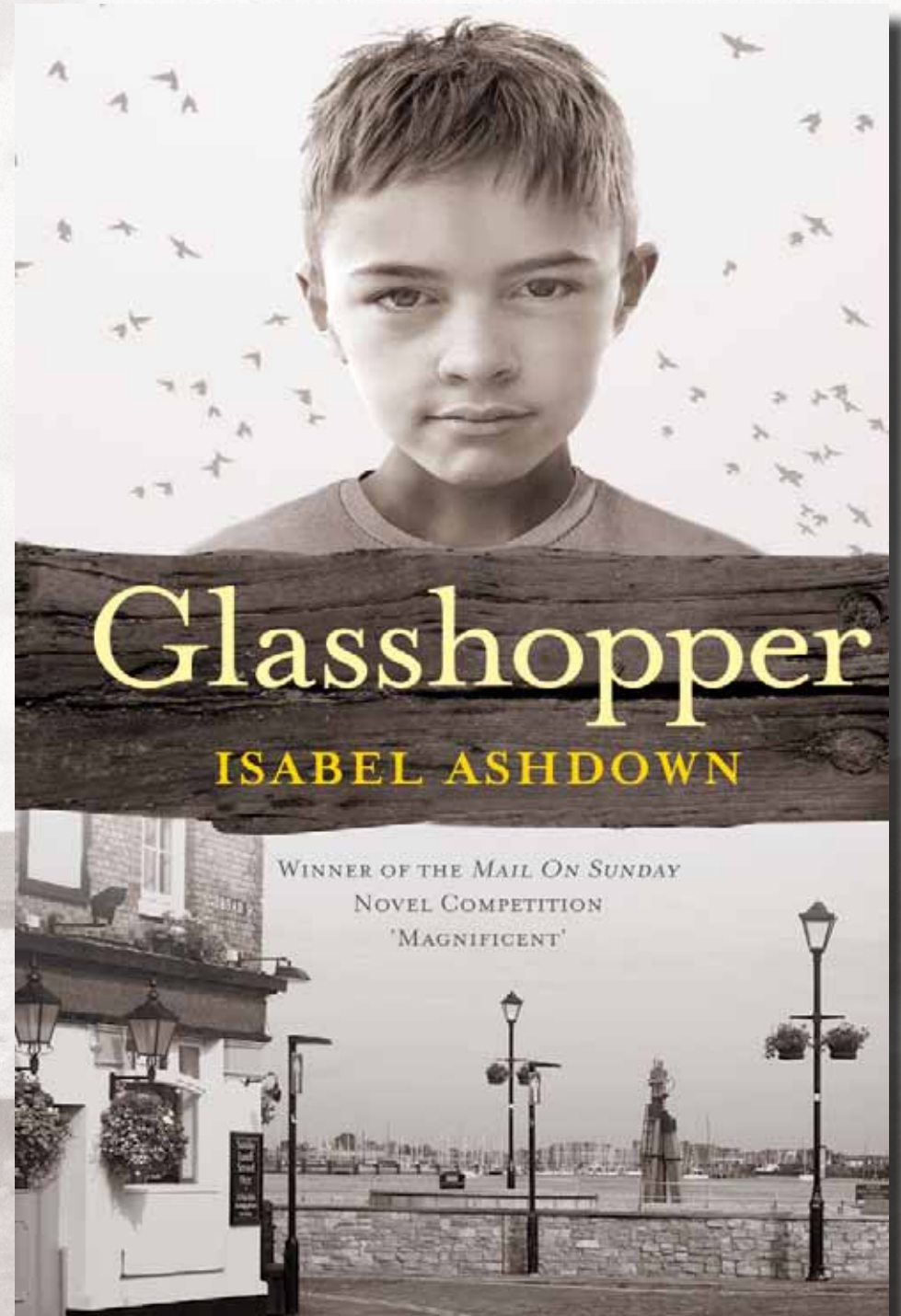
Isabel Ashdown's debut novel tells a captivating story of family life, at once troubling, funny and joyous. Vividly bringing to life the gentility of a 1950s childhood, the free-spirited hedonism of the Sixties, and the urban domesticity of 1980s Portsmouth, this is an intimate, lyrical and deeply moving portrait of a family crumbling under the weight of past mistakes.



Isabel Ashdown's eagerly anticipated second novel *Hurry Up and Wait* was released in June 2011.

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For Discussion

1. Having read the novel do you find yourself more attached to either Jake or Mary?
2. What makes the family in *Glasshopper* dysfunctional?
3. Does the novel attempt to attribute blame for their troubles?
4. Does the novel tell us anything about the experience of children with alcoholic parents?
5. What does *Glasshopper* say, if anything, about good or bad parenting, and motherhood in particular?
6. Do you feel sympathetic towards Mary as a character?
7. What is gained by having both Jake and Mary narrate their stories, and what limitations does this present?
8. Is Bill a good father?
9. How does the behaviour and moral code of one generation impact another in the book?
10. What kind of character is Gypsy – is she sympathetic? How does her behaviour also reveal Bill, Stu and Mary's characters?
11. Does our impression of Rachel change as the novel progresses?
12. What does Matt – and his absence – add to the story?
13. Are there any turning points in how we see Bill as the story progresses?
14. How important are the time shifts within the novel?
15. How does the shift in location to the Dordogne change the atmosphere of the end of the novel?
16. How does Bill react to the news of the accident, and how is this reflective of his character?
17. How does Jake deal with what happens in the Dordogne, and his father's reaction to events?
18. Could the family have survived Mary's alcoholism had the novel ended differently?
19. Is the novel judgmental or prescriptive in its depiction of alcoholism?
20. What is it that unbalances the family – could it be secrecy? Addiction? Betrayal?