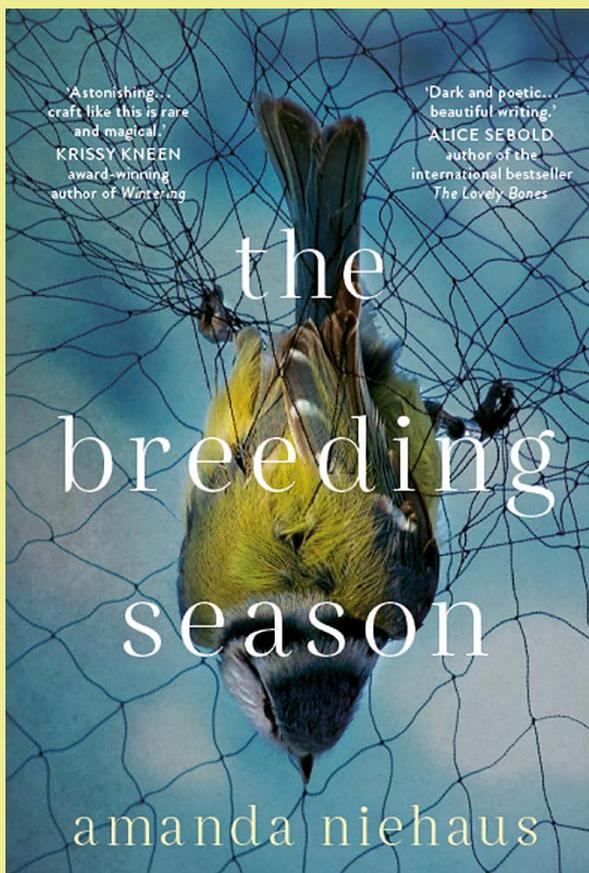


ALLEN & UNWIN'S

Book Group Guide

Conversation Starters



Contents

About the book	2
Praise for Amanda Niehaus	2
About the Author	3
Conversation Starters	4-5

ABOUT THE BOOK

A breathtaking debut that explores love, science, loss and the so-called feminine ideal.

The rains come to Brisbane just as Elise and Dan descend into grief. Elise, a scientist, believes that isolation and punishing fieldwork will heal her pain. Her husband Dan, a writer, questions the truths of his life, and looks to art for answers. Worlds apart, Elise and Dan must find a way to forgive themselves and each other before it's too late.

An astounding debut novel that forensically and poetically explores the intersections of art and science, sex and death, and the heartbreaking complexity of love. *The Breeding Season* marks the arrival of a thrilling new talent in Australian literature.

PRAISE FOR *THE BREEDING SEASON*

'Dark and poetic . . . beautiful writing.'

Alice Sebold, author of the international bestseller *The Lovely Bones*

'Astonishing. The writing is visceral and affecting, the sentences muscular and beating with a linguistic pulse which makes the book feel like a live creature. *The Breeding Season* is a creature that might, in turn, rip your heart out or blanket you in a comforting hug. Craft like this is rare and magical.'

Krissy Kneen, award-winning author of *Wintering*

'*The Breeding Season* is comparable to the works of Emily Bitto, Jennifer Down and Peggy Frew in its emotional complexity...her writing is lyrical and descriptive...she also creates credible multi-dimensional characters for whom the reader cares greatly; an enviable skill, especially for a debut novelist.'

Readings

'Amanda is exploring what we mean when we say transformation - in life as well as by and through the artistic process - and her writing reflects her profound understanding of the ways in which the bodies of women "carry" trauma, loss, grief, illness, birth, death and love.'

Lidia Yuknavitch, award-winning author of *The Book of Joan*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amanda Niehaus is a scientist and writer living in Brisbane, Australia. She has a PhD in ecological physiology, a branch of biology that examines the effects of environments on bodies, and most of her research has focused on metamorphosis or the nexus of sex and death. Amanda is interested in the interplay between scientific concepts and human bodies, desires, and fears. Her essays, stories, and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Creative Nonfiction, AGNI, NOON Annual, Griffith Review, The Writer, and Overland, among others; have been anthologised in Best Australian Essays; and her story "Breeding Season" (on which this novel is based) won the 2017 VU Short Story Prize. The Breeding Season is her first novel.

Contact Amanda:

web <http://www.amandacniehaus.com/>

email: amandacniehaus@gmail.com

twitter: [@amandacniehaus](https://twitter.com/amandacniehaus)

AUTHOR NOTE

I love chatting all things science and writing and life, and I'd love to come along to your Book Club! Here are some discussion points I've put together to get you started, and if you'd like me to Skype/Facetime in or pop in for a cuppa (or glass-a), send me an email (amandacniehaus@gmail.com) and we'll make it happen!

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. The Breeding Season is centred on Dan and Elise's home in Brisbane, but tracks their healing process through varied natural and built landscapes: beaches and riverfronts and forests, art galleries, laboratories. What settings draw Dan and Elise, as a couple or as individuals? What do you think they are looking for in these places? Do they find it?

2. At the novel's beginning, Dan and Elise have just buried their son. How do you think that men and women might experience the loss of a child differently?

3. Describe the arc of Dan and Elise's relationship from the novel's beginning to end. Do you like them as people? Does your opinion of each character change as the story unfolds? Are there symmetries in their experiences?

4. In the late 1950s, British chemist C.P. Snow famously lamented the divide between the sciences and the humanities. He believed that the world's great problems could only be addressed by united efforts of the 'two cultures'. Do the sciences and arts/humanities remain divided today? How are Dan and Elise's perspectives shaped by their training in these disciplines? What are some of the moments that highlight their ways of seeing the world?

5. The evening after his writing class at the State Library, Elise tells Dan: "You need to write something for yourself." What does she mean? Why is it important that he do so?

6. Elise studies antechinuses—mouse-sized marsupials that invest so much energy into a single breeding season that they die soon after a three-week sex frenzy (males) or after weaning the young (females). Essentially, it's a trade-off between lifespan and reproduction. How does this trade-off relate to our own human lives, and the way we spend our time? Is it the same as work-life balance?

7. For both species that Elise studies, the males die before the females. This means that—at certain times of the year—most of the adult population is female. How would human societies differ if, periodically, there were no adult males? Has this ever happened in reality?

8. How do Dan and Elise view their own and each other's bodies? The bodies of strangers? How do the characters in the novel use their bodies to gain power? Describe some moments when this works and when it doesn't.

9. Birds are a recurring symbol in *The Breeding Season*. What do they represent? Does their meaning change over the course of the novel? How does the cover image reflect the story? What other kinds of symbols can you identify? Discuss how they strengthen the novel.

10. Many novels focus on a single character. Here, we have two. What insights do you get from having both sides of the story? Does this make it richer, or is it repetitive? How would the story differ if it were written in only Dan's perspective, or only Elise's?

11. Dan and Elise must come to terms with losses in their past and current lives. How do they remember loved ones that have died? Do you think William's death differs from these past experiences? How?

12. Legacy is a major theme in the novel. What do Dan and Elise want to leave behind in the world? How does this desire drive their behaviours? What control do we have over how we are remembered?