

Dinner Topics for Discussion Party

1. **“Everything is ok,” she said out loud to no one.’ (12)** Kate is a character in denial for much of the book. In what ways does this manifest? Is it noticeable in other characters too?
2. The idea of splitting is important in the book, both in terms of the twin relationship and in Kate’s eating disorder, which sees her lead a double life. Is Kate **‘living for two’ (33)**, or is she living only half a life?
3. **‘It was different for all three of them, Kate saw that now for the very first time.’ (149)**. How are each of the Gleeson siblings affected by their family tragedies? How do they try to distract themselves from their pain?
4. There is plenty of dark humour in *Dinner Party* to offset the tragedies. Who is the funniest character and why? Ultimately, is the book a sad or hopeful story?
5. The messy web of family is at the heart of the book. Did you feel like the siblings have a supportive relationship? Has Bernadette as matriarch helped or hindered these relationships?
6. Much of the drama of the novel revolves around Bernadette and her erratic behaviours. Did you feel sorry for her at all? Is she a victim or a product of the society and age of the times?
7. The book explores mental illness in various guises. Kate sees her eating disorder as a solution, rather than a problem. Why do you think this is? The other characters can be helpless in the face of such certainty and rigidity. In what ways do they try (and sometimes fail) to connect with Kate?
8. **‘Oh, those tricky thirties. A decade of striving and uncertainty. A decade of want.’ (222)** What do you think of this characterisation of being in your thirties? Why do you think Kate’s struggling comes to a head at this point in her life?
9. **‘Rag Doll... Serious student by day, absolute mentalist by night’ (125)**. Do you feel like Kate becomes a different person when she goes to university? How is leaving home a catalyst for her character to change?
10. The beginning of the book offers a version of an alternate life: the twins running away together from the farm and family. Do you think Kate’s life would have turned out differently if Elaine had lived?