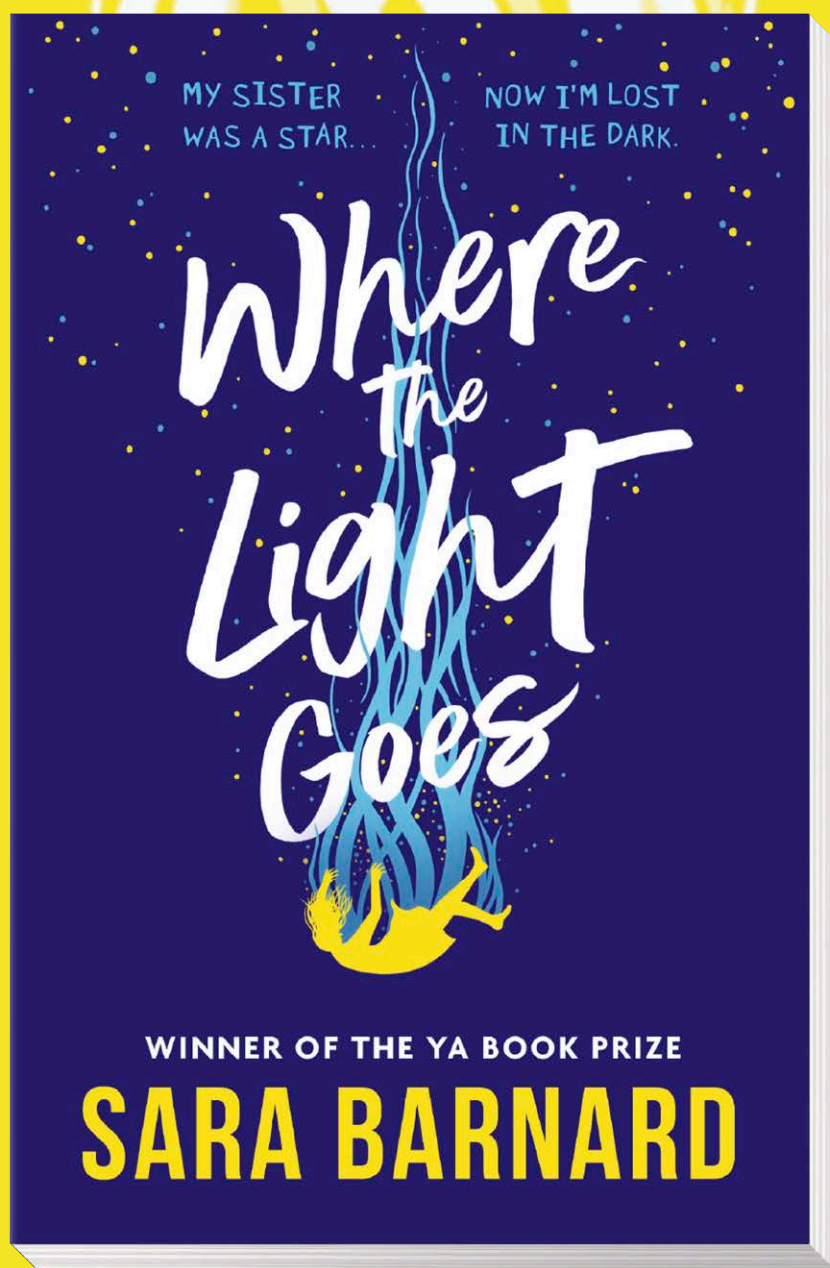


WALKER BOOKS

DISCUSSION GUIDE



9781529509137 • Paperback • £8.99 • For Ages 14+

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Where ^{the} Light Goes

BY SARA BARNARD

ABOUT THE BOOK

Where the Light Goes is a vital, hard-hitting exploration of suicide and grief, expertly crafted by the award-winning Sara Barnard. Emmy, sixteen, faces the death by suicide of her older sister, pop sensation Lizzie Beck. Through the lens of Emmy's memories, the reader sees her attempt to disentangle her sister from the celebrity that everyone felt they knew. Going through the raw and changing emotions of Emmy's grief, we see glimpses of a wider reality, steeped in toxic fame, social media and self-destructive behaviour, as Barnard constructs a fully realised, gritty and imperfect world of loss, fame, guilt, stardom and aspiration. As Emmy must learn how to grieve, she must also find a way to understand the complexity of what has happened, and work out how to piece her own life back together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sara Barnard lives in Brighton and does all her best writing on trains. She is a bestselling author of six novels for young adults. Her debut *Beautiful Broken Things* was a Zoella Book Club pick and she went on to win the YA Book Prize with her third novel, *Goodbye, Perfect*. *Where the Light Goes* is her first novel with Walker Books. Sara believes that sad books are good for the soul, and happy books lift the heart. She hopes to write lots of books that do both.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

There is much to discuss in this excellent novel, but it is a deeply serious book, dealing with incredibly traumatic experiences. It should be chosen for a reading group or book club with great care, and in consideration of the group's members. Ensure that adequate support and signposting is in place before beginning, and consider checking in advance with members before selecting. The resources at the back of the book are a good place to start. It would further be advisable to revisit any ground rules or shared code of conduct before discussing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask for group members' thoughts on the book. What did anyone like about it? Why? What feelings did it provoke?

1. Framing

'Tomorrow (morning) – 1 day gone' -p.23

What is the effect of Barnard's decision to measure the book in time passed since Lizzie Beck's suicide? Why is the book laid out this way? Why does the book begin 'at the end,' with Lizzie's death?

2. Emmy

'How can I believe that *Little Beck* is what she'd want for me?' -p.347

What did the group think of the character of Emmy? Why? Did anyone have mixed feelings towards her? Did people's response change as the book went on? Encourage members to explore the character in depth.



3. The unreliable narrator

"...you still thought completely the wrong thing about Beth leaving the band..." -p.329

Check understanding of the term 'unreliable narrator'. Why is it important that the reader experiences the story through Emmy's eyes? How does this choice of first-person narrative interspersed with, e.g., social media posts, affect how the reader sees Emmy or Beth? What impact does this have on the whole narrative?

4. Grief

'Changes in you; in your state of mind; your process of coping with your grief.' -p.243

How does Barnard present the idea of grief and grieving in the novel? How does it differ from character to character? How does it affect characters' actions? Is grief a 'process'? Does it have an end point?

5. Fame and fortune

'Lizzie Beck is the inevitable casualty of an age that favours clicks over substance.' -p.72

What does the novel say about fame and toxicity? Is it a warning against it? Or a cautionary tale? How does it treat the question of whether anyone could have prevented Beth's dying by suicide? Was it 'inevitable'? Why are different people affected by fame, or even just by social media, so differently?

6. Grey

'For being tough love Grey on soft grieving Emmy.' -p.235

Why does Emmy push away her friends for most of the novel? Are there any parallels between Emmy and Grey, and Beth and Jodie? How are they similar? How different? What part does Grey play in the book?

7. Mal

'I really should stop believing him when he says things.' -p.301

How is Emmy's father portrayed in the novel? Why does he want Emmy to join the Jinks? Are his actions justifiable? Did anyone have sympathy with his actions? Why, or why not?

8. 5 years gone

'Things I am: older, wiser, happy, Emmy' -p.375

Consider the very end of the novel. What does the reader know about Emmy, five years later? Does it matter that the reader knows nothing about any of the other characters? What has been concluded, by the end, if not the details of the plot or narrative?

