ALLEN & UNWIN'S

Book Group Guide

Conversation Starters
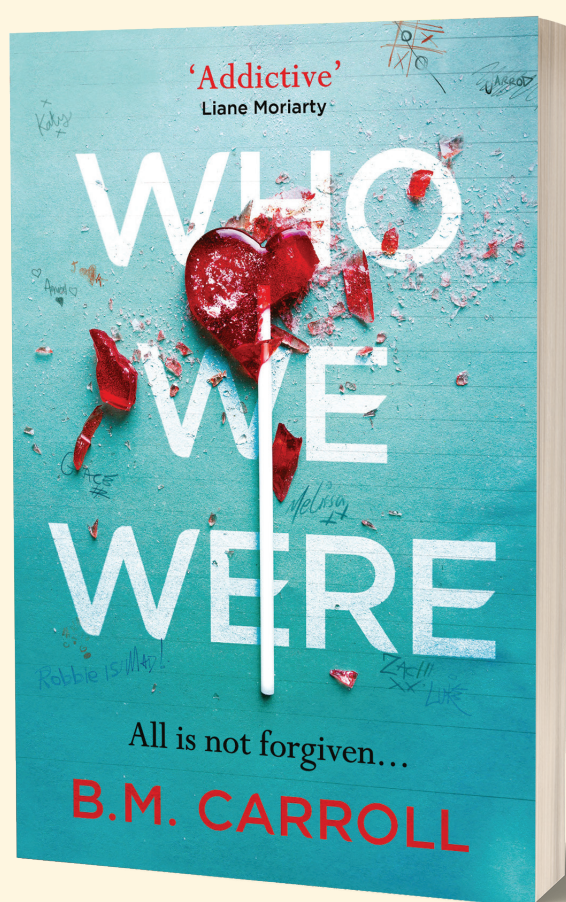
CONTENTS

About the author

B.M. Carroll was born in Ireland, and spent her early career working in finance. She is the author of nine novels, her most recent being *The Missing Pieces of Sophie McCarthy*, which was described as 'irresistibly good' by Liane Moriarty. She lives in Sydney.

About the book

A gripping novel about the power of childhood cruelty, and how it makes us the adults we become.

IT'S BEEN TWENTY YEARS
BUT ALL IS NOT FORGIVEN

Katy is not the shy schoolgirl she once was, and she's looking forward to showing her classmates who she's become.

Annabel was the queen bee. But her fall from grace changed her life forever.

Zach was cruel, but he thinks he's changed.

Robbie was a target. And he never stood a chance.

The reunion will bring together friends and enemies, many for the first time in decades. But someone is still holding a grudge...

Conversation starters

- Katy tells her students that they can reinvent themselves as soon as they walk out the school's doors and into the world. They can leave behind the fact that they were the quiet one, or the socially awkward one, or the silly one.
  Discuss whether you think a complete reinvention is possible. What are you like today compared to your persona at school?

- School reunions, much like school itself, can elicit extreme reactions: excitement, nostalgia, curiosity, competitiveness, and even distress.
  Have you ever attended a school reunion? What kind of feelings did it stir in you?

- Zach regrets much of his behaviour at school. However, Zach has made mistakes in his adult life too, mistakes which have compromised his marriage.
  Is Zach a good husband? Does he deserve Izzy's forgiveness?

- Grace is watchful of the friendships that her children form and tries to veer them away from relationships that compromise their own identity.
  Don't have one friend, she tells them. *Have lots and lots of them. Be your own person, not just a mimic of your friends.*
  Should parents manipulate their children's friendships, even if those friendships are damaging?

- Our high-school years are an intense, formative period in our lives. Some people thrive at school while others are utterly miserable. Some are sad to leave while others are counting down the days to freedom.
  How did you feel during your final few weeks at school? Which camp were you in: dying to get out of there, or dragging your heels?

- Our high-school years can also coincide with the rush of first love and, unfortunately, our first experience of heart-break. Feelings can be blithely dismissed as crushes or puppy love or something temporary and inconsequential. The truth is some people never love as intensely or trustingly again. This is certainly the case for Melissa.
  Did you have a high-school relationship or crush? Are there any remnants of those feelings left today?

- Every school reunion carries a degree of sadness and loss. Lives cut short because of accidents or illnesses. Those who fail to launch into self-functioning adulthood or fall by the wayside due to mental health issues, addictions or other struggles. Robbie has been fighting battles on a number of fronts.
  Discuss Robbie's perception that he needs to be on his own, amid strangers, to cope with life. Sienna, his niece, has forged a fondness for him. How do you see this relationship playing out in the future?

- Luke's motto is to look forward, not back. But looking back helps us to understand who we are, and how far we've come.
  Discuss Luke's journey in the novel and his role in the group.

Just for fun

- Who would you cast in a screen adaptation of *Who We Were*?

- If you could have a chat with any character from the novel, who would it be and why?
  What three questions would you ask them?

- Pick out a passage that strikes you as particularly moving or interesting and read it to the group.