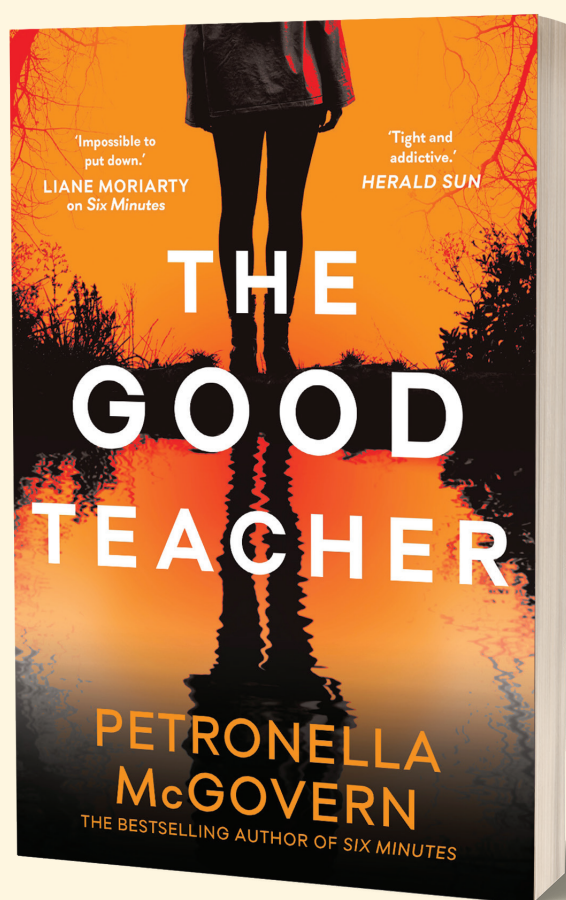


ALLEN & UNWIN'S

Book Group Guide

Conversation Starters



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About the author



Credit: Giles Park Photography

Petronella McGovern is a writer and editor who grew up on a farm outside Bathurst, NSW. After working in Canberra for a number of years, she now lives on Sydney's northern beaches with her husband and two children. Petronella's bestselling first novel, *Six Minutes*, was published in 2019. *The Good Teacher* is her second novel.

You can find out more about Petronella online at www.petronellamcgovern.com.au or on Facebook @PetronellaMcGovern

About the book

From the bestselling author of *Six Minutes* comes a fast-paced, heart-stopping thriller full of gripping tension, twists and turns.

A good teacher can change lives...

Every evening, Allison watches her husband's new house, desperate to find some answers. Every morning, she puts on a brave face to teach kindergarten. She's a good teacher, everyone says so—this stalking is just a tiny crack in her usual self-control.

A late enrolment into her class brings little Gracie. Allison takes the sick girl under her wing, smothering Gracie with the love she can't give her own son. When Gracie has a chance to go to America for treatment, Allison whips up the community into a frenzied fundraising drive.

But as others start to question her judgement and the police arrive at her door, Allison wonders if she can trust herself. Has she crossed a line?

How far will the good teacher go to save a life? And whose life will that be?

An intriguing tale of our times about kindness and betrayal, and the danger of good deeds.

Praise for *Six Minutes*

‘Impossible to put down and full of twists and turns you won’t see coming! I loved this fabulous debut novel.’

—Liane Moriarty, bestselling author of *Nine Perfect Strangers*

‘This book is one-of-a-kind. A beautiful, exciting one-of-a-kind. The writing is tight and addictive, and hours of reading will fly by as you race through this gripping whodunit, trying to guess and second-guess who the baddie is.’

—*Herald Sun*

‘A superb debut full of twists that will have you guessing until the last, tense moment.’

—*Who*

‘A suspenseful suburban thriller that steals your time and won’t give it back.’

—Crime Book of the Month, Readings.com

‘In a small community where everyone knows everyone else, everybody has secrets. No matter how far you try to outrun your past, even uprooting your life and the lives of your family to the literal other side of the planet, somehow you never escape.’

—Newtown Review of Books

A note from the author, Petronella McGovern

The spark for this book came together in a few different ways—from a newspaper article, through some online stories and while volunteering at my children’s school. Every Friday morning, I helped a cheeky little Kindergarten girl with her reading. My mission was for her to master the alphabet. But a few weeks later, her home life erupted into crisis and I realised she needed more than just my assistance with reading.

It started me thinking about how much help we should give and the difference it can make. And on the flipside, is that help always welcome? Should we trust strangers who rush in to give assistance? Sometimes, they’re helping for their own reasons. And sometimes, that help is misguided. *The Good Teacher* looks at all aspects of giving and taking—the altruism, the motivations, the ability to manipulate others, and the power of bringing a community together for a cause.

I was editing this book during the Australian bushfires and into the beginning of the pandemic. We’ve certainly seen the worst—and the very best—of human nature. These terrible times reinforce what a few characters say in *The Good Teacher*, we need kindness and a strong sense of community to take us into the future.

Conversation starters

1. Felix thinks his parents suffer from 'white knight syndrome'—they both want to rescue other people.
Do you agree with this assessment of Allison and Tony?
2. Maz wants to 'save' Gracie for completely different reasons to Allison's.
What do you think about Maz's motives?
3. Allison says: 'But if we don't look after them [Gracie and Luke], then what sort of people does that make us?' (pg 313).
Do you agree with the following quote: *The measure of a civilisation is how it treats its weakest members?*
4. Does empathy and compassion make us more vulnerable? Is it an essential part of what makes us human?
5. The Wirriga community comes together to help Luke as the sole parent of Gracie. Do you think they would have responded in the same way if he were a single mother?
6. Who do you feel is the most trustworthy character in the book?
7. Luke questions the psychology of online fundraising: What made strangers give to Gracie? (pg 134)
Why is it that some campaigns attract thousands of dollars while other equally worthy one's struggle to raise more than a few hundred?
8. Maz dreams of a 'magic pill' to fix Gracie. Are we becoming more obsessed by miracle cures? Is it because of scientific breakthroughs or due to our 'on-demand' society where we can access anything with the click of a button?
9. The wellness industry was worth \$4.5 trillion globally in 2018. Do you think the boom in 'wellness' has made us healthier?
10. Maz thinks that true news and cures are found outside the traditional media. In our world of misinformation, how can we figure out what's real and what's fake online?
11. At the end of the book, Felix writes an assignment on the Othello quote: *It makes us or it mars us*.
Do you think the main characters will be 'made' or 'marred' by the events?
12. What do you think the future holds for Allison? Will she patch up her marriage?
13. A good teacher can change lives. Do you remember a teacher who influenced your life in some way?
14. When Allison reads Aesop's Fables to the class, do you agree with what she says?
No-one is too little to do good. Every act of kindness, even a small one, can really matter.

Just for fun

- Who would you cast in a screen adaptation of *The Good Teacher*?
- 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.

If you enjoyed *The Good Teacher*...

May we recommend the following?

