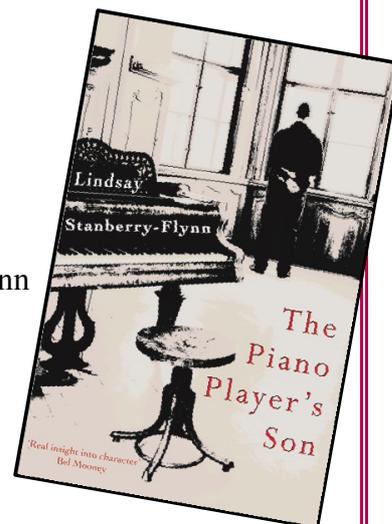


Reading Group Guide

This free guide to *The Piano Player's Son* by Lindsay Stanberry-Flynn is available for reading groups. The guide contains background to the book and discussion topics.



About the author



Lindsay Stanberry-Flynn was born in London and studied in Liverpool, before becoming a lecturer in English. She wrote her first stories as a child. After leaving full-time teaching, she took an MA in creative writing at Bath Spa University. Lindsay's first novel *Unravelling* was published in 2010, and went on to win several awards. *The Piano Player's Son* is published by Cinnamon Press after winning their novel award in 2012. A number of her short stories have been published in anthologies, and/or successful in competitions.

Background to *The Piano Player's Son*

In *The Piano Player's Son* I wanted to explore family dynamics and power struggles that can take place within even the closest of families. The family has the potential to provide love and security, together with the most significant relationships of an individual's life. Conversely, it can also prove to be the source of the most destructive of relationships, causing conflict and unhappiness.

I have chosen to begin the novel with the death of Henry, the father, because I believe a death can disrupt the finely-tuned network of family dynamics, leading to friction and disharmony. I decided the inheritance of Henry's beloved piano would be the trigger, as inheritance – whether big or small – can sometimes be the arena where wider power struggles are played out.

In addition, I was interested in the emotional reactions of bereaved family members. Each of the four grown-up children had different feelings and attitudes towards their father and these have to be accommodated as they come to terms with his death. Despite dealing with the trauma of Henry's death, the existing problems in their own lives refuse to go away and must be dealt with alongside their grief.

I also wanted to explore the impact of secrets, especially when they emerge after a death, when all chance of questioning the person has been removed. I have often read about people who suffered huge pain when they discovered something that had been kept secret from them, when they might have known the truth quite readily, if they'd been told. It is the secret rather than the truth which is hurtful and harmful.

Ideas for discussion

1. The novel deals with the intricacies of family relationships. Can you relate to any of the relationships explored?
2. How much sympathy do you have for Eva, the matriarch of the family?
3. Which of the siblings, Rick, Isabel, Grace and George, do you feel most empathy with and why?
4. Rick is a dominant, controlling character. To what extent do you find his behaviour understandable given his family background and relationship with his parents?
5. Isabel expresses her determination to get the family back together following her husband, Brian's, rejection of her. In the light of Brian's behaviour, are you convinced by her declaration, and can you see a justification for her response?
6. Do you find Deanna a sympathetic character?
7. Place plays an important role in this novel. Which of the four main settings – north London, Penzance, Rothbury or Ischia – comes to life more vividly for you?
8. Can you any justification for Henry and Eva's actions and the secrets they kept.
9. Would you have liked to gain more insight into George's head by having some chapters from his perspective, or do you think it's important that he remains a more shadowy character than the other siblings?
10. Do you find Grace's attitude to her husband, Franco, reasonable?
11. Have you ever kept an important secret? If so, have you found this a burden or not?
12. In the novel, secrets are shown to be corrosive, damaging even if they don't emerge, and explosive if they do. Do you believe keeping secrets can be beneficial or not?
13. Despite already being dead as the novel starts, Henry dominates his family's thoughts and reactions. Do you think some people cast a long shadow even after their deaths?
14. What does Archie Stansfield's character bring to the novel?
15. Do you find the end of the *Piano Player's Son* satisfying, and if so, why?

The Piano Player's Son is published by Cinnamon Press, ISBN978-1-907090-93-6 and is available from bookshops, online booksellers and libraries.

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