

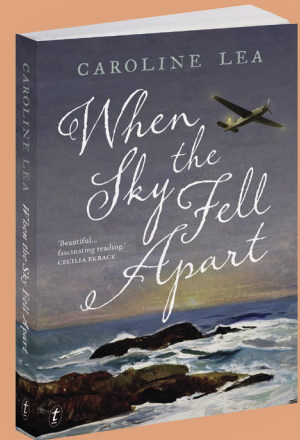
When the Sky Fell Apart



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A reader's introduction to *When the Sky Fell Apart*

In June 1940, war still seems a long way from the rustic and sea-swept Channel Island of Jersey—until the Germans begin a bombing campaign, marking the start of their invasion of the island. Within twelve weeks, 12,000 troops have landed. Thousands of locals abandon the island, but many stay, determined to carry on with their lives despite the occupation.

Among them is Claudine, a ten-year-old girl who witnesses the first bombing on the beach. Her home life has been turned upside down since her father left the family to fight in France. In his absence, Claudine's mother has sunk into depression, leaving Claudine and her little brother, Francis, incredibly vulnerable.

Claudine is taken under the wing of Edith, the island's brilliant—and eccentric—herbalist. Together with local fisherman Maurice, whose wife is suffering from a rare disease, and the English doctor, Carter, they form an unlikely and powerful friendship. But as the Germans' grip on Jersey tightens, an unforeseen event forces them to make a difficult decision—one that puts all their lives in terrible danger.

Book Club questions

1. Small towns have always been notorious for gossip. As Maurice reflects on p. 20, 'Gossip seeped in with the sea water, insinuated itself like the salt and spread the rot from the inside,' and Madame Hacquoil, whose husband Clement is horrifically burned during the bombings on the beach, is a particular perpetrator. How does gossip come to damage the characters in the novel? What might have been different during the occupation had there been less gossip around Jersey?
2. How does Claudine's friendship with Gregor change her? How does this friendship change Gregor? And how does Gregor's presence change the way the Jersey locals think and behave?
3. 'He had loved her as long as he had loved anything.' Maurice's love for Marthe is profound but painful. How does Maurice show his love for his wife? Is he a typical man of that time, caring as he does for her? What impact does Marthe's illness have on Maurice and his safety on the island?
4. Claudine's mother, Sarah, is soon labelled a 'Jerry-bag' by the locals, a derogative term for a woman who consorted with German soldiers. Is it possible to sympathise with Sarah, having to support two children on her own? What implications does her relationship with the German soldier Hans have for Claudine?
5. Carter is a kind, considerate and passionate doctor, but he is also a man with secrets. How do his secrets damage him? Why can't he live truthfully? Would Carter have had the same struggles in 2016 as he has in 1940?
6. We learn that Edith lost a baby girl many years ago, and that she buried that 'scrap of a thing' in the ground near her cottage. How does Edith show her grief throughout the novel? How does this grief affect the decisions she makes? How strong is Edith's sense of place and belonging? Has this changed by the novel's end?
7. The Commandant rules over Jersey with complete impunity. Carter is given the unfortunate task of attending to him—a job that sees the locals turn against him. What would you have done in Carter's position? What other options does Carter have? And how does Carter come, eventually, to undermine the Commandant's rule?

8. Betrayal is a powerful central theme of this story. How do various characters betray each other? Is this betrayal a result of the occupation, or does it stem from the personal traits of the individuals involved? Which character's dilemma did you most identify with?
9. The novel begins when Claudine is just ten years old. How is she forced to grow up? How much can this be attributed to the occupation, and how much to other circumstances? How has Claudine changed by the end of the novel?
10. Love is a profound unifier in *When the Sky Fell Apart*. How does love manifest in each character's story both before and during the occupation? Does this love offer comfort or does it imprison them? Can love ever truly transcend the horrors of war? What is the price each of the main characters must pay for love?