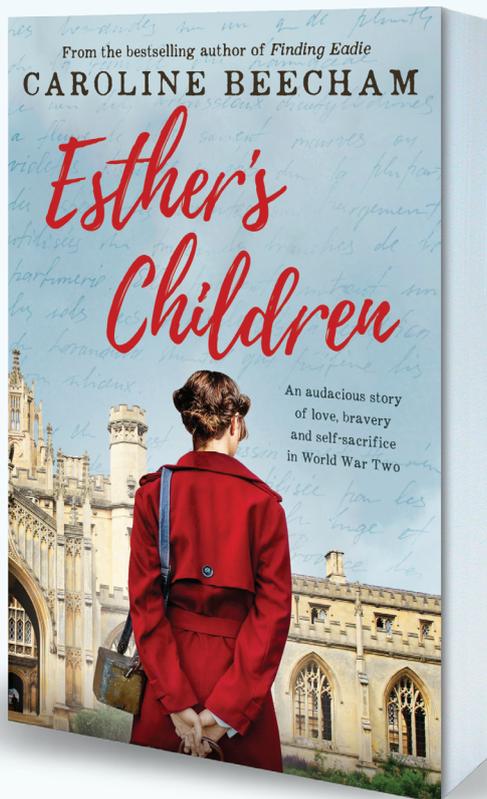


ALLEN & UNWIN'S

Book Group Guide

Conversation Starters



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About the author

Caroline is a novelist, writer and producer. She is the author of four books: the bestselling novel, *Maggie's Kitchen* (2016), *Eleanor's Secret* (2018), *Finding Eadie* (2020) and *Esther's Children*, to be published May 2022. Her debut novel, *Maggie's Kitchen*, was shortlisted for Booktopia's Best Historical Fiction in 2016 and nominated as Book of the Year and Caroline as Best New Author by AusRom Today. She has worked in documentary, film and drama, and discovered that she loves to write fiction and to share lesser-known histories; in particular those of pioneering women whose lives speak to us now. Caroline studied the craft of novel writing at the Faber Academy in Sydney, with Curtis Brown Creative in London, and has a MA in Film & Television and a MA in Creative Writing. She lives in Sydney with her husband and two teenage sons.

About the book

From the picturesque streets of pre-war Vienna to Britain's atmospheric cities in the grip of war, *Esther's Children* is the perfect read for fans of Kate Quinn's *The Alice Network*, and Kelly Rimmer's *The Warsaw Orphan*.

Inspired by the extraordinary life of Esther Simpson, *Esther's Children* is a powerful novel of love and courage.

Austria, 1936: Esther 'Tess' Simpson works for a British organisation that rescues academics from the cruel Fascist and anti-Semitic regimes taking hold in Europe. On a dangerous trip to Vienna to help bring aid to Europe's threatened Jewish scholars, Esther meets Harry Singer, a young Jewish academic and musician.

Tess works tirelessly to rescue at-risk academics and scientists from across Europe, trying to find positions for them in Britain and America. In 1938, she secures employment for Harry at Imperial College, London, their love affair intensifying as the world heads into war; yet they are separated once again as Britain moves to intern European refugees.

With Harry detained on the Isle of Man while still waiting for news of his parents, Esther and the Society plead with the government for the interned scientists' release. When Harry is eventually liberated, his future with Esther is by no means secure as he faces an impossible choice.

Confronting the horrific dangers of World War Two with remarkable integrity and bravery, Esther Simpson is revealed as an exceptional heroine. But someone is still holding a grudge...

A note from the author

When I first heard about Esther Simpson I was intrigued by her life and legacy as well as what a hidden heroine she was, and I hope you'll find her story just as interesting. She really was a trailblazer; she was university educated in the 1920s and then taught herself other skills so she could work in Europe and not settle for a job as a schoolteacher or similar as was expected of educated women in Britain at the time. She then went on to bravely help rescue thousands of academic refugees from wartime Europe, many of whom she showed great kindness and friendship to. I hope you enjoy reading about Esther and discussing the novel.

*Best wishes,
Caroline Beecham*



Conversation starters

- Why do you think the author, Caroline Beecham, chose Esther as inspiration for her novel?
- What was the role of music in the story and in the characters' lives?
- Esther was faced with many hard decisions; do you think she succumbed to the pressures of society or forged her own path?
- Do you think women are strong characters in the book? If so, what shows their strength?
- What do you think was the hardest part of the refugees' experience as described in the novel?
- While Esther's family were Jewish, Esther identified as a Quaker. How did this influence Esther's actions? Was there a conflict in this?
- Esther risks her life in returning to Austria, who/what would you risk your life for?
- Contrast Esther's and Harry's parents. How are they similar/ different?
- In Chapter 34, Esther reads a quote from Albert Einstein on Science and Civilisation in her presentation to the Central Refugees Committee.

'It is only men who are free who create the inventions and intellectual works which to us moderns make life worthwhile.'

What do you think about this statement? Do you feel the same as Esther?

Just for fun

- Who would you cast in a movie adaptation of *Esther's Children*?
- What was your favourite passage from the book? Read it out to the group.
- If you were to write a novel about a historical figure, who would it be and why?

Scan the QR code for the book club playlist selected by author Caroline Beecham



If you enjoyed *Esther's Children*...

May we recommend the following?

