



# Picnic at Hanging Rock

By Joan Lindsay

First published in 1967

Genre & subject

Australian fiction

Classical fiction

## Synopsis

In 1900, a class of young women from an exclusive private school go on an excursion to the isolated Hanging Rock, deep in the Australian bush. The excursion ends in tragedy when three girls and a teacher mysteriously vanish after climbing the rock. Only one girl returns, with no memory of what has become of the others.

## Author biography

Lady Joan Lindsay (16 November 1896 – 23 December 1984) was an Australian author, best known for her "ambiguous and intriguing" novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Born Joan à Beckett Weigall in St Kilda East, Victoria, Australia, she was the third daughter of They're à Beckett Weigall, a prominent judge who was related to the Boyd family, perhaps Australia's most famous and prolific artistic dynasty. Her mother was Ann Sophie Weigall née Hamilton.

Joan Weigall married Daryl Lindsay in London, on St. Valentine's Day 1922. The day was always a special occasion for her, and she set her most famous work, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, on St. Valentine's Day.

When the couple returned to live in Australia, they renovated a farmhouse in Baxter, Mulberry Hill, and lived there until the Great Depression forced them to take up humble lodgings in Bacchus Marsh, renting out their home until the economic situation improved.

Lindsay also wrote several plays which remained unpublished, although one, *Wolf*, was performed. She contributed articles, reviews and stories to various magazines and newspapers on art, literature and prominent people. She and Daryl co-authored the *History of the Australian Red Cross*.

Lindsay, Daryl, and Lord and Lady Casey were founding members of the National Trust of Victoria, and she encouraged others to bequeath to the Trust. Lady Lindsay was interested in the development of a national identity, and her novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* - in Peter Weir's hands - was hailed as initiating a Renaissance in Australian film.

Daryl Lindsay died in 1976. Lady Lindsay died in Melbourne in 1984 of natural causes. The Lindsays had no children. They donated their Mulberry Hill house to the National Trust upon her death.

## Discussion starters

- How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"?
- Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, inner qualities.
- Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? Do they learn something about themselves and how the world works?
- Is the plot engaging—does the story interest you?
- Talk about the book's structure. Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints? Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did—and what difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?
- What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?
- What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character?
- Is the ending satisfying?
- If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?
- Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

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