

***The Shadow House* by Anna Downes – Book Club Questions**

1. Pine Ridge, the setting of *The Shadow House*, is an ecovillage. Had you ever heard of or even visited a community like this before reading? Could you see yourself living in an ecovillage? Why do you think the author chose to set her story here?
2. Can you think of any significance to the fact that Pine Ridge used to be, not just any farm, but a flower farm?
3. Early in the first chapter, Alex says of their new home, 'The peace was exaggerated by the shape of the valley – shallow and round, like a dish ... The surrounding trees acted as natural soundproofing.' Why do you think this quiet, out-of-the-way set-up appealed so much to Alex as the novel begins? How does her view of the quiet – and safety – of the village change?
4. Renee and Alex are both mothers with difficult sons, and both lived in the same area, albeit years apart. What other similarities did you see between these two women, the story's two point-of-view characters? How are they different? In what ways do they protect their sons – or not?
5. We're also introduced to two teenage boys: again, years apart, but seemingly tortured by similar demons – Ollie and Gabriel. Why do you think the author chose to focus specifically on teenage boys?
6. In Chapter 5, a boy describes to Alex what the symbols she keeps seeing mean: bones, a doll and blood. What do you think is the significance of these particular objects?
7. Even in the seclusion of Pine Ridge and the Kellermans' farm, Ollie and Gabriel aren't cut off from the world: they have the Internet. In Chapter 6, Renee says, 'Kids nowadays met up online instead of in parks; their playgrounds were virtual instead of grassy.' How does easy online access affect the children in this story? What about the parents? Do you consider the dangers of children going online to be a theme of this story, or more of a red herring? What do you think the author intended?
8. Among our cast of present-day characters, there are a number to whom Alex feels drawn, yet slightly wary of. Kit: young, handsome and somehow familiar; Jenny: kind and helpful, but lonely; Layla: a peer and a friend who is nevertheless quick to judge; and Maggie: perhaps the most straightforwardly antagonistic. Did you agree with Alex's decisions to keep her walls up? Did she ever choose to trust someone you wish she hadn't?
9. Family is both a salve and a trap at various times throughout *The Shadow House*. Which familial relationships represented here are healthy and happy? Which are troubled? What do you think makes the difference between the good and bad relationships in this story?
10. Fear manifests itself in many different ways throughout the book, especially parental fear. Many of the characters are trying to protect their loved ones but ultimately act out of fear: how does fear work both as a positive and negative motivating factor? What examples can you think of in *The Shadow House*?
11. When did you first begin to suspect there might be more to Jenny than meets the eye? And were you surprised by what had happened to Gabriel? How did the events of the past affect the present, and what do you think that says about these characters in particular? And what comment does this make on how the past can shape the present for all of us?