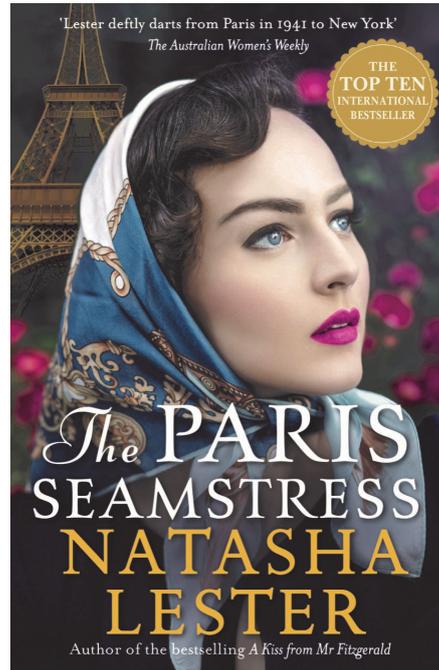
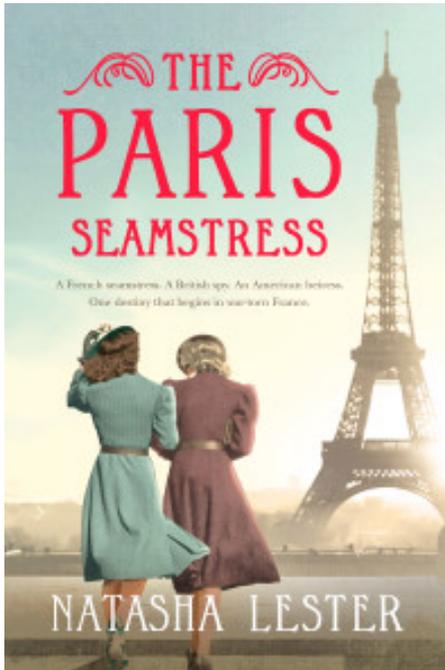


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. When Estella is sitting in a lifeboat in the middle of the ocean, she reflects that clothing has “power beyond the fabric and the thread and the pattern.” That clothing can give you courage, or comfort, or transform you into a different person. Do you have a piece of clothing that transforms you, or that makes you feel different, or that you choose to wear for certain occasions? Discuss the special meaning behind some of the clothes described in the book.
2. The idea of bravery, and of courage, is at the heart of the novel. At the Musée de l'Armée in Paris, Fabienne wonders if people are still capable of being as selfless now as they were during the war, of acting for a greater good rather than acting only for themselves. What do you think? Has contemporary life has diminished the concept of bravery, and are heroes now defined in a different way?

3. Estella's mother makes a very difficult decision when she decides to leave one of her babies behind with the Thaw family. What other choice could she have made? Was another choice even possible at that time in history? How did you judge her for the decision she ultimately made?

4. Estella works as a copyist in Paris, copying designs at fashion shows and selling the illustrations to American department store buyers. Were you surprised to learn that fashion's long history of copying stretches back so far? Was there anything else that you learned about the fashion industry in the book that surprised you, or was there anything you hadn't previously known about the industry and its history?

5. In the author's note at the back of the book, the author says that she wanted to look at the long and difficult legacy left for women when men are allowed to do terrible things, over and over, and without punishment. Have things changed in contemporary life? What do you think of the idea that, while sometimes historical fiction shows us how far we've come, sometimes it also shows us how far we still have to go?

6. Fabienne argues with her boss at the Powerhouse Museum that fashion should be seen as art rather than fad. Is fashion art? Is haute couture just a senseless waste of money or can it be compared to purchasing a painting, or a sculpture? Do you "consume" fashion – buying seasonal pieces and then not wearing them again once the trend has passed? Discuss your own attitude to fashion, and the attitudes of some of the characters in the book.