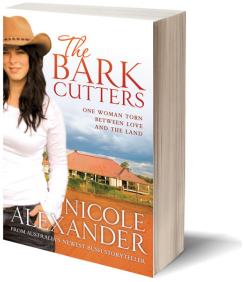
RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

THE BARK CUTTERS
by Nicole Alexander



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1. In each successive generation whether through planning, accident or ability there is only one person capable of running Wangallon. How does this affect the property's longevity?

2. Succession planning (the passing on of the family property to the next generation) is a major issue in Australian agriculture. Why do you think Angus Gordon retained control of Wangallon, thereby denying his own son the right to manage it? Do you believe Sarah has a right to be offended when her brother is anointed successor? (p. 21-)

3. Angus Gordon has a loose plan that he believes will ensure both of his grandchildren remain on the property. What is it?

4. Why was it important for Sarah to leave Wangallon after Cameron's death although at the time it appeared that she was running away? (p.126)

5. The benefits of living in the city versus that of the country are explored through Sarah's eyes. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages that Sarah experiences?

6. Sarah's love for her rural heritage is continually tested on many fronts. Discuss those areas: These include her family, her time in the city and the harshness of the rural environment.

7. Why is Sarah unwilling to admit to herself that she loves Anthony?

8. Describe Anthony's character 'arc' in the story. That is, how does he grow and change?

9. Should Ronald be blamed for not being aware of his wife's needs and expectations early in their marriage? (p.120-)Is it weakness, guilt or a questioning of his own morals that leads him to accept Cameron as his son? Why does he not do more to support Sarah during her childhood years when she is faced with a disinterested, often harsh mother?

10. Mrs Jamieson, Tootles Reynolds and Lorna Sutton all play pivotal support roles in the work. Discuss what each of these characters brings to the story in terms of plot development.

11. A single incident in Scotland changes Hamish's life forever. What happened? What character trait/s makes forgiveness impossible for him?

12. Charlie Gordon's death on the goldfields leaves Hamish with a lasting feeling of guilt. Why does he feel that way and how does Charlie's death affect Hamish's future? (p. 68)

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13. Who is Hamish's closest friend and why is their relationship unusual? Where does their reciprocal loyalty stem from?

14. Name two characters in both time frames who you consider to be similar in terms of both personality and what they experience.

15. Unrealistic expectations shadow two female characters in the work. Who are they and how are these two women similar? Would you agree that neither have the mental resilience to rise above adversity? Or is one stronger than the other?

16. In the historical section of the work Hamish has Abdullah Abishari murdered (p.388) after he discovers a relationship exists between him and Hamish's wife Rose. In the contemporary section Angus Gordon has his daughter-in-law Sue's lover killed in the 1960's under the guise of a botched robbery attempt. Are these murders acts of pure revenge?

17. Hamish first sees Claire Whittaker outside a butcher's shop in George Street Sydney. Why is he so enamoured of her?

18. Why does Claire travel to Wangallon after her father dies and why does she stay?

19. Do you think that Hamish always intended to marry Claire?

20. Name two of your favourite characters in the work. Why do you like them? What character traits (good or bad) make them appealing?

21. Discuss the treatment of Aboriginals in the work.

22. Discuss the use of symbolism in the work. The owl has a dual purpose in the narrative and is representative of ? Why does Claire dislike Rose's gold bangle? Why does the same bangle appear in the contemporary section? Does the use of such devices add to the spiritual quality that pervades parts of the work?

23. What is the purpose of the epilogue?

24. The spirits that roam Wangallon are tied to it for many reasons. How important is this to the story? What are the advantages of using an interweaving narrative involving different timeframes in this work?

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