

# The Girl Who Came Home by Hazel Gaynor

## Discussion Questions

1. We all know the fate of Titanic. What impact does this knowledge have on you as you read the book? How do you feel about the Ballysheen group as they leave their homes and as they board Titanic at Queenstown?
2. Kathleen Dolan is single-minded in her decision to take her niece back to America with her. Discuss Kathleen's role in Maggie's life and also her role in influencing the others in the Ballysheen group to travel to America.
3. Grace makes a brave decision to drop out of her college course to stay at home with her mom. Does Grace have a choice in this? How does her decision and the sacrifices she makes for her family contrast with the decisions forced upon Maggie in 1912.
4. Who are you rooting for as the drama of the events of April 14th unfold?
5. Many of the warnings and predictions of disaster which the Ballysheen group experience i.e. the reading of the tea leaves, the warning from the stranger at Queenstown, the dropped "lucky" sovereign, the "belly up" fish in the Holy Well are all based in recorded facts. The "near miss" with the moored boat in Southampton docks at the very start of Titanic's journey is also an event which really happened. Discuss the many aspects of superstition and myth which surround Titanic.
6. Maggie and the other survivors were in their lifeboat for eight hours before they were picked up by The Carpathia and they were then on board The Carpathia for several days. Had you considered the experience of the survivors before reading the book? Are you surprised at the extent of their ordeal, after getting safely off Titanic?
7. There are several key relationships in the novel. Discuss your thoughts on the relationship between any of these: Grace and Maggie; Maggie and Seamus; Maggie and her Aunt Kathleen; Catherine Kenny and her sister Katie; Maggie, Peggy and Katie; Harry and Peggy.
8. Emigration was very common in Ireland in 1912 with many families separated by the belief and hope that there was a better standard of living to be found in America. The "American wakes" were a common occurrence across the country, marking the departure of loved ones. Have you experienced emigration in your own family? How would you feel if you had to make a similar decision to that made by the Irish emigrants who set sail on Titanic?
9. There have been many other shipping tragedies since Titanic. Cunard's passenger liner, RMS Lusitania (travelling from New York to Liverpool), sank off the coast of Ireland in 1915 when the liner was struck by a torpedo fired from a German submarine. 1,198 civilians lost their lives in the event. In the light of many tragedies with great loss of life, why do you think people continue to be so fascinated by Titanic, a hundred years on?
10. Australian businessman, Clive Palmer, is currently starting construction on a replica of Titanic—Titanic II—which is scheduled to re-create Titanic's maiden voyage in 2016? There have been very mixed reactions to this among relatives and descendants of Titanic's passengers and Titanic enthusiasts. What are your thoughts on the project?

