

# DISCUSSION GUIDE





## About The Way Back Home:

ZOE BIRD IS GOING NOWHERE FAST.

She's angry and lonely, and her only true friend is her granny, whose Alzheimer's is worsening.

When her parents put Granny in a home, Zoe decides now is the time to break free. She smuggles Granny out and together they hit the tracks on a cross-country trip to find Zoe's long-lost uncle.

But there will be some home truths along the way. . .

## About Allan Stratton:

Allan Stratton is the internationally acclaimed author and playwright. His award-winning novel *Chanda's Secrets* was made into the Cannes Film Festival hit *Life, Above All*. His young adult novel *The Dogs* was nominated for the Carnegie Medal. He lives in Toronto with his partner and their four cats. His work has been published in fifteen countries.

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## Discussion Guide:

1. Zoe has taken the blame for things her cousin Madi has done.
  - a. Some people think you should never tell on anybody out of loyalty. Other people think you should tell for fairness and justice. What do you think and why?
  - b. If you knew somebody was being punished for something that someone else did would you tell? Why or why not? If you didn't tell, would you feel guilty?
2. Zoe feels trapped in a clique run by a bully. What are the problems of getting out of a clique or a gang? What are the costs of staying in the clique or gang?
3. Zoe's family isn't as wealthy or socially important as Madi's family.
  - a. How does a difference in social rank (at school or in the world) affect the way people treat each other?
  - b. What are other kinds of groupings that affect how people are treated?
  - c. Is how other people are treated our business: i.e. are we responsible for standing up for other people who are being treated unfairly? What are the risks of standing up for others? What are the consequences if we don't?





4. Do you think Zoe understands Granny's problems at the beginning of the novel?

a. If yes, why do you think Zoe makes excuses for Granny (even to herself)?

b. Why do we make excuses for people we love?

c. If we love someone, is it kinder to make excuses for them or to have a serious conversation with them? When do you think we should do something and when should we mind our own business?

5. Granny's decline becomes more noticeable throughout the novel. If you were Zoe, what would be the three biggest things you'd notice? Would you deal with them as Zoe does? Why? If not, what would you do?

6. Do you think Zoe decides to bring Granny to find Uncle Teddy mainly for Granny or for herself? How do you decide if you're doing something for the right reasons?

7. Sometimes people do what they think is best, but the result is disastrous. Other times people make bad choices and there ends up being a good result.

a. If you make a reasonable decision that ends badly, should you feel guilty?





b. If you decide to do something that you know is wrong and it has a good result, does that excuse you for having done something wrong?

c. Does the end justify the means? In other words, is the result the only thing that matters in our choices? Or is the way we reach a result equally important?

#### 8. Granny lost contact with a child she loved

a. Do you think both of them had good reasons for breaking contact? If yes, is there anything they could have done to make things better? If not, who do you think is most responsible?

b. What are some reasons close friends or family members may stop seeing each other? In which cases do you think it's possible for them to reconcile?

#### 9. What do you think will happen to Ryder?

10. What do you think it would be like to have Trigger and Tibet as parents? What are the qualities that would make them good parents? If they were your parents, what are the things that might concern you?

11. Forgiveness is an important theme in the novel, but not every character is forgiven. Do you think we should always forgive? If yes, why? If no, what conditions should people meet to be forgiven?

