

WANTING

Reading group questions

1. The unifying theme of *Wanting* is a yearning for something more. How is this expressed in the lives and desires of the central characters: Mathinna, Dickens, Lady Jane and Sir John?
2. *'A savage, be he Esquimau or Otaheitian, is someone who succumbs to his passions. An Englishman understands his passions in order to master them and turn them to powerful effect.'* So says Charles Dickens as he prepares to defend the reputation of Sir John Franklin's lost Arctic expedition against charges of cannibalism. What does Dickens' statement mean for those like Mathinna in Van Diemen's Land? And what does it mean for Dickens' own life?
3. What are Lady Jane Franklin's true motivations in attempting to offer Mathinna *'every advantage of class and rank'*? And why does she abandon the girl when the Franklins return to England?
4. Much of Richard Flanagan's writing has an undercurrent of humour. His novel, *Gould's Book of Fish* is tragi-comic, whereas *The Unknown Terrorist* has been praised for its dry wit. Discuss the humour in *Wanting*.

- Wanting* is without doubt a tragic story, but tragedy unfolds in different ways for Dickens and Mathinna. What are the parallels in their stories?

- Richard Flanagan has said *Wanting* is not a historical novel, but rather a 'soul history'.
6. What do you think Flanagan means by 'soul history'?

- Unlike many novelists, Richard Flanagan seems to be constantly seeking to reinvent himself and his writing, more in the manner of an artist or musician than that of a writer. What similarities and differences are there between *Wanting* and Flanagan's earlier novels, such as *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* or *Death of a River Guide*?
- 7.