

I for Isobel

1. What is the significance of the chapter title "The Birthday Present" in the context of the novel as a whole?
2. "You built a wall around yourself and too late you found yourself walled in." Does Isobel create her own unhappiness?
3. I for Isobel suggests that books can be both a source of solace and an excuse for avoiding social realities and responsibilities. Discuss.
4. Why does Isobel find it difficult to develop healthy relationships with others?
5. I for Isobel illustrates that it is more important to value personal integrity than constantly to seek the acceptance of others. Do you agree?
6. I for Isobel suggests that people's values develop more through interaction with others than through childhood experience. Discuss.
7. "The effects of childhood abuse are permanent." Discuss this idea in relation to the novel.
8. "Isobel's detachment from society enabled her to cope with her past." Discuss.
9. "Thou shalt not be different." How does Isobel deal with her differences from others?
10. "Isobel, as she listened, tried on each life to see if it would suit her." Why does Isobel find it difficult to be herself?
11. "This was life: no sooner had you built yourself your little raft and felt secure than it came to pieces under you and you were swimming again." Isobel is perpetually uneasy, whether because of circumstance or her internal discomfort with social interactions. Discuss.
12. What comment does Witting offer on death and grief in I for Isobel?
13. Isobel asks herself: "was it dialogue? Were they acting in a play?" In what way (or ways) is the protagonist distanced from the people around her by her unique perspective of the world?
14. I for Isobel portrays a world that is entirely limited by circumstance, particularly for women. Discuss.
15. What is the effect of the significant and sudden temporal shifts that offer glimpses into different periods within the protagonist's life?
16. "Fate was stricter than any headmistress." What role does the notion of belief in fate play within I for Isobel?
17. "Then she saw that her mother's anger was a live animal tormenting her, that she, Isobel, was an outlet that gave some relief and she was torturing her by withholding it." Although Isobel's mother appears only in part of the novel, the cruelty she enacts on her daughter is felt throughout the entire story. Discuss.
18. I for Isobel depicts how there is no one way to grieve, but that humanity is united by the common thread of mortality. Discuss.
19. Isobel expresses a desire to be "one of the crowd," but struggles to achieve that simple goal. Discuss.
20. "Literature should be a gentleman's pleasure, not a hack's employment." What comment does I for Isobel offer on the different roles that individuals can play in interacting with literature?

Previous VCAA Study Designs

2003:

i. Isobel says: "I want to be one of the crowd".

Isobel feels a strong need to belong but does not know how to achieve this.

Discuss.

OR

ii. I for Isobel illustrates that an individual comes to understand what is important in life by reflecting upon

other people's behaviour.

Discuss.

2004:

i. Why does Isobel find it difficult to develop satisfying relationships with others?

OR

ii. I for Isobel illustrates that it is more important to value personal integrity than constantly to seek the acceptance of others.

Discuss.

2005:

i. "You built a wall around yourself and too late you found yourself walled in."

Does Isobel create her own unhappiness?

OR

ii. I for Isobel suggests that people's values develop more through interaction with others than through childhood experiences.

Discuss.

2006:

i. "Isobel, as she listened, tried on each life to see how it would suit her."

Why does Isobel find it difficult to be herself?

OR

ii. I for Isobel demonstrates that while honesty is essential, it is not always enough to sustain successful relationships.

Discuss.