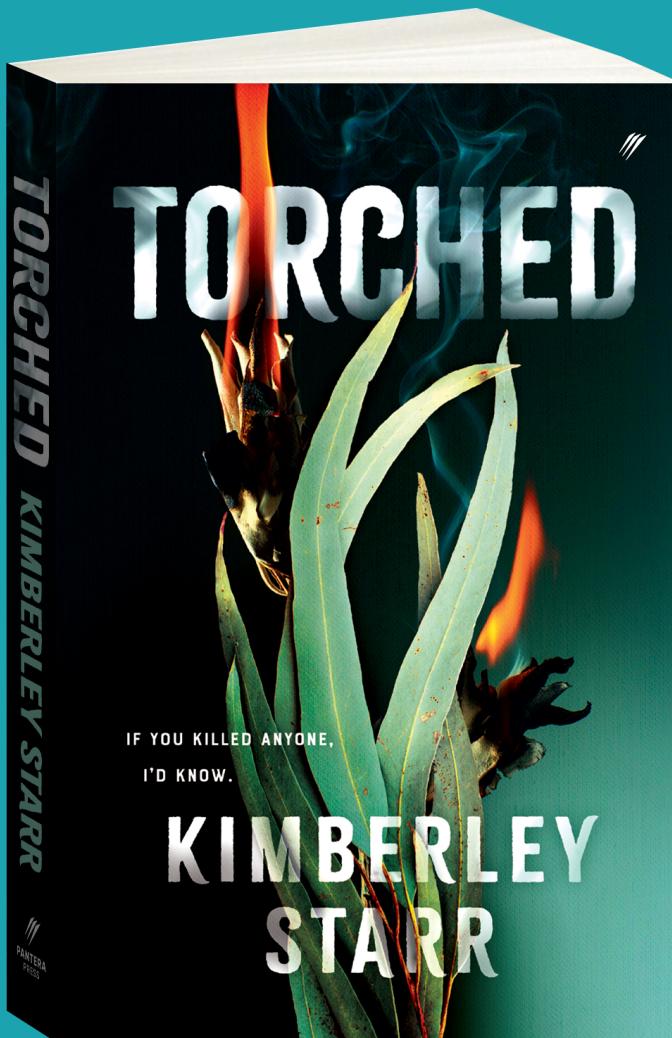




SPARKING  
IMAGINATION,  
CONVERSATION  
& CHANGE

# BOOK CLUB NOTES



## Praise for *Torched*:

*"Kimberley Starr draws on potent forces – bushfire, guilt, maternal love – to tell this story with a sharp eye, deep compassion and mythic intensity."*  
Debra Oswald, author of *The Whole Bright Year* and creator/head writer of *Offspring*.

*"...a terrific meditation on the meaning of motherhood in the face of misunderstanding, disbelief, outright malice, and intimate deception... poetically and powerfully rendering the other vital and omnipresent character of Torched – fire itself."*  
David Whish-Wilson, *Australian Book Review*

*"Torched is an abidingly thoughtful rumination on human nature, secrets and unforeseeable consequences."*  
Louise Swinn, *The Saturday Paper*

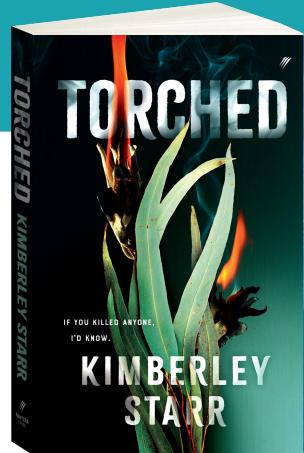
# BOOK CLUB NOTES



SPARKING  
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## TORCHED

by Kimberley Starr



*An explosive, haunting and utterly compelling crime novel about mothers and sons and the ties that bind them.*

A small Yarra Valley town has been devastated by a bushfire, and Reefton Primary School Principal Phoebe Wharton can't sleep. She's the single mother of Caleb who is accused of starting the fire – on purpose. Twelve people are dead, students from her school among them; only a monster would cause such carnage. But where was her son that day? No one knows but Caleb, and he's not talking.

Against mounting community rage, Phoebe sets out to clear her son. But every avenue leads back to Caleb. Why did he vanish from his Country Fire Authority shift? Who else was at the abandoned goldmine that day? Why is Caleb refusing to speak?

Phoebe will be forced to confront the nature of guilt and redemption, and decide what boundaries she is willing to cross to save the son she loves.

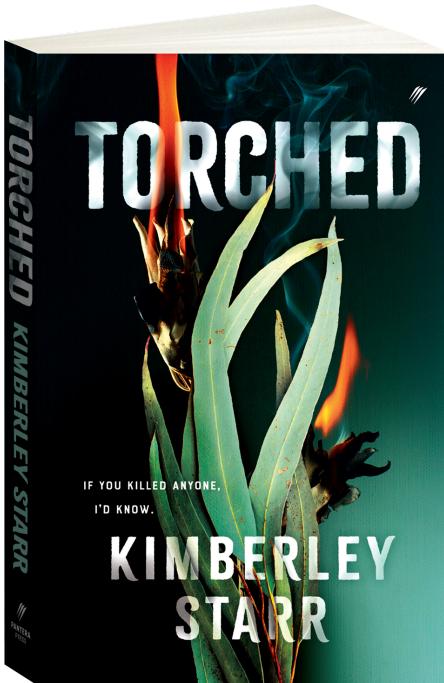
### About the author

Kimberley Starr is an Australian novelist and teacher whose novels have won and been shortlisted for multiple literary awards, including the Queensland Premier's Literary Award and the Text Publishing YA Prize. She lives with her sons and their labrador in semi-rural Victoria and is currently completing a PhD in Creative Writing.



# BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that Phoebe was a trustworthy figure or reliable narrator? How does the way she appears to the reader change as the story progresses?
2. What was the significance of Phoebe's collection? How did her compulsion to take things affect the people around her?
3. Discuss Caleb's motives for keeping his whereabouts during the fire a secret.
4. Phoebe and Caleb are treated as outsiders in Brunton. How might this story be different if they had been perceived as 'locals'?
5. The second part of the novel was told from the perspectives of both Phoebe and Caleb. How did the addition of Caleb's voice affect the story?
6. Which characters do you sympathise with and why?
7. Caleb kills an injured wallaby out of kindness. What is symbolic about this?
8. How do the references to ancient goddesses interact with the story?
9. How does Phoebe's obsession with finding the truth and proving Caleb's innocence affect her character and the lives of the people around her?
10. Are Sadie's journalistic methods fair? How would you describe her standards?
11. Discuss the significance of the poem 'Drought' on page 96?
12. Why do you think Stephen doesn't get involved in Caleb's defence?



## More by Kimberley Starr

- *The Book of Whispers* – Text Publishing (2016)
- *The Kingdom Where Nobody Dies* – University of Queensland Press (2004)