



Finding Home
Shelley Banks

Reading Guide

About the Book

After a devastating tragedy, Sophie Bennett leaves behind the life she once loved, retreating to the quiet rural town of Hillford in northwestern Queensland.

Seeking space to grieve and rebuild, she takes over a small bookstore and begins again.

But Hillford offers more than solitude. Through unexpected friendships, a welcoming community, and the possibility of new love, Sophie discovers that healing isn't about leaving the past behind—it's about learning how to live alongside it.

Finding Home is a heartfelt story of resilience, belonging, and second chances.

About the Author

Shelley Banks is a Brisbane-based author of contemporary women's fiction. With a background in communications and a passion for storytelling, she writes emotionally resonant novels that explore relationships, identity, and personal growth.

Her other works include:

- The Long Way Around
- The Diary and the Green Dress
- One Weekend

She is also the creator of September Sprouts, a blog featuring both fiction and non-fiction pieces designed to inspire readers to explore new perspectives.



Key Themes and Analysis

Grief and Healing

At its core, the novel explores how grief reshapes identity. Sophie's journey demonstrates that healing is not a linear process or a destination to be reached.

Instead, it is an ongoing negotiation between remembering and living.

The story challenges the idea of "moving on," suggesting instead that we learn to carry loss in a way that allows us to keep going.

The Meaning of Home

The concept of home is expanded beyond physical space. For Sophie, home evolves from a place tied to memory into something built through connection, safety, and belonging.

The novel asks an important question:

Is home something we return to—or something we create?

Key Themes and Analysis

The Power of Community

Hillford functions as more than a setting—it becomes a quiet, guiding force in Sophie's healing. The town's residents offer support not through grand gestures, but through consistent, small acts of kindness.

This theme highlights how community can:

- Provide stability during upheaval
- Encourage connection without pressure
- Help individuals rediscover themselves

Self-Discovery and Reinvention

Sophie's relocation is not just physical—it is deeply personal. Stripped of her former identity, she is forced to confront who she is without her past.

The novel explores how:

- Trauma can disrupt identity
- Reinvention can be both freeing and confronting
- Growth often comes from discomfort

Key Themes and Analysis

Love After Loss

Opening her heart again is one of Sophie's greatest challenges. The novel thoughtfully portrays the emotional complexity of second chances, including guilt, fear, and vulnerability.

It asks: Can loving again coexist with honouring what was lost?

Letting Go vs. Holding On

Rather than presenting a clear answer, the story embraces the tension between memory and moving forward. Sophie's journey reflects the reality that letting go doesn't mean forgetting—it means making space for both past and future.

Hope and Quiet Resilience

Transformation in *Finding Home* is subtle and grounded. The novel celebrates:

- Small steps forward
- Everyday courage
- The quiet strength required to rebuild a life

Character Focus

Sophie Bennett

Sophie is a deeply relatable protagonist whose emotional journey drives the novel. Her evolution is gradual and realistic, shaped by grief, connection, and self-reflection.

Key aspects of her arc:

- From withdrawal → cautious engagement
- From grief-defined identity → self-rediscovery
- From emotional guardedness → openness to possibility

Hillford (as a Character)

The town itself plays an active role in the narrative. Its stillness, routines, and close-knit nature create a space where Sophie can begin to heal.

Hillford represents:

- Stability
- Observation without intrusion
- The healing power of environment

Symbolism & Motifs

The Bookstore

A symbol of refuge, routine, and quiet connection. It reflects Sophie's gradual re-entry into the world and her role in fostering community.

The Farmhouse

Represents comfort and emotional safety, offering Sophie a space to process her grief.

Open Landscapes

The wide Queensland setting mirrors both isolation and possibility—emptiness that can either overwhelm or invite renewal.

Discussion Questions

1. Sophie leaves her old life behind in search of a fresh start. Do you think it's possible to truly "start over," or do we always carry our past with us?
2. How does grief shape Sophie's identity throughout the novel? In what ways does her understanding of loss evolve?
3. Hillford is portrayed as a quiet but deeply observant community. How does the town itself function almost as a character in the story?
4. Sophie finds comfort in small routines, especially through the bookstore. What role do routine and place play in the healing process?
5. Discuss the significance of the relationships Sophie forms in Hillford. Which connection impacted her the most, and why?
6. The novel suggests that healing isn't about forgetting. What does "healing" mean to you after reading Sophie's journey?
7. How does the story explore the idea of "home"? By the end of the novel, what does home mean for Sophie?

Discussion Question

8. Sophie struggles with opening herself up to love again. What fears hold her back, and are they justified?
9. The community in Hillford seems to know more than they say. How does this dynamic influence Sophie's journey?
10. In what ways does the novel challenge or reinforce expectations about moving on after loss?
11. Did Sophie's decisions toward the end of the book feel authentic to her character? Why or why not?
12. What moments in the story felt the most emotionally powerful or relatable to you?
13. If you could give Sophie advice at the beginning of the novel, what would you tell her?
14. How might the story have been different if it were set in a large city instead of a small town?
15. What do you think happens next for Sophie after the novel ends?

AUTHOR Q&A

What inspired you to write *Finding Home*?

The story began with the idea of what happens after loss—how people rebuild their lives when everything familiar is gone. I wanted to explore grief in a way that felt honest but also hopeful, and to show that healing can come from unexpected places.

Sophie's journey feels very intimate and real. How did you approach writing her character?

I focused on the quieter moments—those internal shifts that often go unnoticed. Sophie's journey isn't about dramatic change, but about small, meaningful steps forward. I wanted readers to feel like they were walking alongside her.

AUTHOR Q&A

Hillford plays such an important role in the novel.

Was it inspired by a real place?

While Hillford is fictional, it's inspired by rural Australian towns where community is strong and life moves at a different pace. I wanted the setting to feel like a character in its own right—steady, observant, and quietly supportive.

The novel explores love after loss. Why was that important to include?

Because it's complicated. There's often guilt and fear tied to the idea of moving forward. I wanted to show that opening your heart again doesn't diminish what's been lost—it honours the capacity to keep living.

Reader Prompts and Personal Reflection

These prompts are designed for deeper, individual engagement beyond group discussion.

Personal Reflection Prompts

- Think about a time when your sense of “home” changed. What defined home for you in that moment?
- Sophie finds healing in routine. What routines in your own life bring comfort or stability?
- How do you personally define “moving forward”? Has this definition changed over time?
- What does resilience look like in your life—quiet persistence or bold action?
- Reflect on the idea of second chances. What makes them difficult to accept?

Reader Prompts and Personal Reflection

Creative Reader Prompts

- Write a short journal entry from Sophie's perspective six months after the novel ends.
- Describe your own version of a "Hillford"—a place (real or imagined) where you feel at peace.
- Create a playlist that reflects Sophie's emotional journey throughout the novel.
- Write a letter from Sophie to her past self at the beginning of the story.

Final Reflection

Finding Home is ultimately a story about rebuilding—not in dramatic leaps, but in quiet, meaningful steps. It reminds readers that healing doesn't erase the past; it reshapes how we live with it.

Through Sophie's journey, the novel offers a hopeful message:

Home is not just where we've been—it's where we choose to belong.

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it's something we create.**

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