

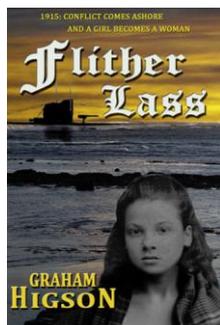
# Reading Group Guide

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## Flither Lass

by Graham Higson

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### About the book

In a small Yorkshire coastal fishing village, 16-year-old Amy Trott makes a meagre living scouring the shoreline for flithers (limpets) to use as bait on her father's fishing lines. It is an inhospitable world of deep crevices and rock pools, where the fast-flowing tide can so easily trap the unwary in minutes, cutting them off from safety.

Wild and unkempt, she is marginalized by the local community, which treats her as slow-witted, a virtual outcast. In those days, flither girls were seen as the lowest of the low; the hard work they did, toiling in freezing conditions, scaling cliff faces, wading out to sea and braving the treacherous currents, went largely unappreciated and undervalued. Amy braves the ferocious conditions without question or complaint; it is all she has ever known.

One stormy day, her life is torn apart when her beloved father is lost at sea. In her denial of events, she searches the sea and shore, convinced that he will return, but instead of her father she finds another refugee washed ashore. Facing a life-threatening decision, she can either leave him there to perish and save her own life, or she can try to save both herself and this mysterious man. But in doing so, she risks being cut off and suffering a cruel death in the freezing water of the North Sea. The trouble is, it is 1915 and the refugee is German ...

Thus begins a story that combines family conflict, adventure, war and romance, in which we witness Amy's rite of passage as we share her secret while she focuses all her attentions on this illicit friend. The conflict that came ashore turns a girl into a woman.

This story gives a glimpse of life during the First World War from a different perspective.

## Discussion points

1. Flither Lass begins with a short prologue told in the present tense. From the outset you are aware that the author is speaking directly to you.

- How did this make you feel?
- Was it like being taken into his confidence?

2. Jack's attraction to Amy remains constant throughout the story. This is especially evident towards the end when he argues with Jane for him wanting to take her in. But there is another reason why he wants to give Amy a roof over her head.

- Why do you think this is?

3. Although there is evidence that Amy's father loved and cared for her, there are instances where it is apparent that he did not do as much as he might have done.

- What are these signs?
- Why do you think it was like this?
- Could it be said that he lavished his time on Amy, but he was unable to lavish material things on her?
- Is this a comment on the poverty that existed at that time?

4. Chapter 24 includes a mention of the forest-dwellers in Germany: a simple and practical race of people, who were the subject of English tourist curiosity. Consider the following extract:

The women wore little, mainly only for protection, and to prevent upsetting the English Victorian tourists who paid extra marks to see this strange tribe and yet were shocked at seeing bare skin.

- Discuss whether this is a comment on tourist culture.
- Can you see any parallels with contemporary practices?

5. Do you think that the village as a whole was exceptionally mean in its treatment of Amy?

- Discuss any clues that show this might not be the case.

6. What is Orla's rôle in the story?

- Do you get the impression that she was in some way invisible to the majority of the villagers?
- Why do you think this was?

7. The peripheral characters of Dan, Beth, Jane, William the old fisherman, and Sally play key rôles in the story.

- Discuss how each of these affects what happens.

8. How would you describe Amy's relationship with Hugo?

- What does he offer her that neither Jack or Larry can?
9. What key rôle did Florrie play, bearing in mind that she doesn't affect the central plot?
10. In *Flither Lass*, a small, remote fishing village such as Wyke Bay is portrayed as being somewhat out of date with changes in society that had occurred after the death of Queen Victoria.
- In what ways do you think the villagers would be able to resist social change after the First World War?
11. How do the issues facing the women in the story differ from those today's women are facing?
- Are any of them the same?
  - Could this story be told in a contemporary setting?
12. None of the characters is perfect – each one is flawed. Does this help or hinder the narrative?

## Author Bio

Graham Higson was born in Huddersfield, and lives in an outlying Yorkshire Pennine village that, he says, is so high up it's the last stop but one before the sky. He shares this blustery environment with a growing collection of books, and his understanding wife. His two grown-up children are among his best friends.

He has a BSc degree in technology (in which he managed to sneak a course about playwriting), and an MA in Professional Writing from University College Falmouth, where he specialised in screenwriting. Having written professionally for over 25 years, *Oak Seer* (*A supernatural mystery*) was the first of his published novels, followed by *Flither Lass*.

He lists his hobbies as swimming, reading, watching lots of screen drama, and helping to republish the novels of Leo Walmsley.

## **Flither Lass**

by Graham Higson

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