

Reading group questions

1. Despite the evocative historical setting, *In the Mood* feels very much like a modern story, exploring many issues relevant to women of today: love, intimacy, motherhood, career and non-traditional family structures. Discuss the relevance of this story to a modern-day readership.
2. Trouble starts for Catherine while Robert's at war when, desperate with loneliness, she turns to a bottle of gin and heads to the Cross. There she finds trouble, and company in the form of the US Marine, Lewis. What is it about Lewis that draws Catherine to him, and makes him so difficult to part with?
3. Robert's flashbacks to his time in New Guinea provide an interesting insight into life on the battlefield. Is it a romanticised portrayal?
4. This novel shifts in time between Catherine and Robert's separation and reunion, and their story comes together piece by piece, like a jigsaw. Ironically, at the same time Catherine and Robert both unravel before our eyes. Discuss the way Laura Bloom has chosen to tell this story, and how we respond as readers.
5. Catherine is a gifted architect and, like so many other professional women, wartime provided her with professional opportunity. Discuss the impact of the mass retrenchment of women at the war's end on women like Catherine, Edna and Connie. What do you think may have been the longer-term implications on Australian society?
6. Like so many returning servicemen, Robert finds it difficult to adjust to civilian life once the war is over. How has his experience of war changed him?
7. Robert claims his friendship with Keith is what gets him through the war. Discuss the importance of Keith's diary – to both Keith, on the battlefield, and to Robert at the war's end.
8. The homecoming of returned servicemen was a difficult period for both those returning, and those welcoming them back. Both Robert and Des return damaged men. How do Catherine and Pam cope – and how do their domestic lives change in the face of the homecoming?
9. Wartime separation inevitably bred secrets and betrayals between men and women. Discuss Catherine's attitude to the baby she has during Robert's absence, and how her feelings change.
10. Does Pam have sinister designs on Catherine's baby, or is she simply a well-meaning neighbour?
11. Gary knows he is brash and insensitive, yet there is also wisdom about him. Discuss the contradictions in Gary's character, and why he represents those who stand to gain at the war's end.

12. The title of this novel of course comes from the fabulous Glenn Miller jazz piece. How is jazz used as a metaphor in the book?
13. What does this book tell us about male/female relationships – and marriage?