# A Long Way From Home by Peter Carey

## Synopsis

Irene Bobs loves fast driving. Her husband is the best car salesman in western Victoria. Together they enter the Redex Trial, a brutal race around the ancient continent over roads no car will ever quite survive.

With them is their lanky fair-haired navigator, Willie Bachhuber, a quiz show champion and failed schoolteacher whose job it is to call out the turns, the grids, the creek crossings on a map that will finally remove them, without warning, from the lily-white Australia they know so well.

Set in the 1950s amid the consequences of the age of empires, this funny, brilliantly vivid and lively novel reminds us how Europeans took possession of a timeless culture – the high purpose they invented and the crimes they committed along the way.

## Discussion questions

1. It’s been said of this novel that it goes from ‘a laugh a minute to *The Heart of Darkness*’. Discuss the multiple directions it takes after the part titled ‘A Fork in the Road’, and the changes in tone that accompany these.
2. Once Irene sees that Titch isn’t the person she thought he was, her familiar home territory around Bacchus Marsh quickly becomes ‘a different world’ (page 267). Is her sense of home perhaps driven more by people than by place? Consider the treatment given the concept of home, and homeland, elsewhere in the novel.
3. Consider the scene on pages 25–27 in which Willie ponders how to teach his class about refugees and displaced persons: what parallels are drawn with the present situation?
4. What do you make of the phantoms referenced in the novel? Those Willie sees on the road when driving at night, those Irene can feel beneath her feet on the Nullarbor, and the ‘phantom homesickness that gave its distinctive colour’ to Willie’s soul (page 278).
5. Consider the role played by maps in this novel, both actually and metaphorically, both the maps used by Europeans and the ‘paths of ancestral beings’ that connect places in Aboriginal culture.
6. Willie is sentenced to ten years in jail for assaulting Carter while the latter goes unpunished for rape, as do other white characters. Discuss the manner in which the novel imparts details such as this.
7. The final sentence of *A Long Way from Home*is a particularly powerful and beautiful one. Discuss its impact, especially in terms of Willie’s commitment to recording his newfound culture while at the same time respecting the ownership of it.

 *Discussion questions from* [*https://www.penguin.com.au/book-clubs/1776-a-long-way-from-home-reading-group-notes*](https://www.penguin.com.au/book-clubs/1776-a-long-way-from-home-reading-group-notes)