

Discussion Questions for *Do No Harm*

1. To what extent are Matthew and Maria driven by their family histories?
2. ‘A doctor out of time’ – how fair is Matthew’s judgement of himself? Does Matthew represent a disappearing or disappeared world?
3. How significant is Britain’s past e.g. the 1980s, the Second World War to the major themes of the book?
4. What role does religion play in the development of the story?
5. How would you characterise Maria and Jonathan’s relationship? How far is it symbolic of the broader theme of inter-generational tension and miscommunication?
6. How significant is technology (email, social networking sites, blogs, mobile phones) and the media (radio interviews, newspapers) to the direction of the book?
7. What attitudes towards suicide emerge during the course of the book?
8. As she walks through an Underground station early in the novel, Maria muses: “If she died suddenly, how long would it take for anybody to notice that she was even missing and when they did, how long would it be before she had been completely forgotten or just become a wistful memory in the minds of a few people who had known her?” Discuss the theme of loneliness in the novel. Is Maria’s loneliness at all symbolic?
9. On the night before the final day of his trial, Matthew and Eva are given some precious time alone, in which Matthew is made aware of how much he loves his wife. ‘Hidden in the tender embraces of his wife, he knew simply that he loved, that he had loved, that he would always love...and that there was still one impulse left in their lives that could not be regulated or condemned by the omnipresent machinery of the state.’ Consider the close friendships of the novel (not necessarily just romantic connections). How is both friendship and romantic love described in the novel? How important is it?
10. Matthew is frequently revealed as frightened or overwhelmed, at one point he is described as “resembling a small, startled bunny rabbit with a waistcoat and pocket watch about to be flattened by an oncoming truck.” Is Matthew an accidental hero or more of a ‘fall guy’?
11. Maria considers, when she resists the temptation to attack a security guard (having already been arrested several times by this point) that “Jonathan, if he had witnessed the moment, might have said that she had almost grown up.” How far is *Do No Harm* a coming-of-age story for either Maria or Matthew?
12. Maria has a recurring nightmare which occurs on numerous occasions during the novel with slightly altered details every time. What is the dramatic effect of the dream and how does its symbolism change?



13. During their first meeting, Maria blurts out to Matthew: “A Government bureaucrat would be heartless enough to let a woman die... as long as the correct procedures were put in place.” To what extent is the establishment (medical, civil, religious) depicted as ‘heartless’ in the novel?
14. What similarities, if any, are there between Matthew and Lydia’s circumstances?
15. What role does humour and absurdity play in the novel?