

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SALLY HEPWORTH

MAD

They called it murder.
She called it justice.

Mabel

Reading
notes



Blurb

In 1959, at just fifteen years of age, Mabel Waller became the youngest Australian in history to be convicted of murder.

In 2025, on a quiet Melbourne lane, an elderly man is found dead by his neighbour, 81-year-old Elsie Fitzpatrick. No one suspects any foul play.

Until they discover Elsie's past.

In the 1950s, her name was not Elsie. It was Mabel.

**She is known around the world as Mad Mabel. But is she mad?
More importantly, is she guilty?**

When the police open a new investigation and the media descend upon her, the elderly Mabel decides it's time to set the record straight.

In a world first, at the age of 81, Mabel Waller is speaking.

New York Times bestselling author Sally Hepworth is at her finest in this twisty, compulsive thriller of friendship, family and murder.

Or is it justice . . .?

PRAISE FOR SALLY HEPWORTH

'She is one of my favourite Australian writers'

LIANE MORIARTY

'Sally Hepworth is a born storyteller'

TRENT DALTON

'The queen of suburban noir'

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

About Sally Hepworth

Sally Hepworth is the *New York Times* bestselling author of ten novels, including *The Soulmate* and *Darling Girls*.

Drawing on the good, the bad and the downright odd of human behaviour, Sally writes incisively about family, relationships and identity. Her domestic thriller novels are laced with quirky humour, sass and a darkly charming tone. They are available worldwide in English and have been translated into twenty-five languages. *The Family Next Door* is Sally's first book to be adapted for the screen.

Sally lives in Melbourne, Australia, with her family and one adorable dog.

Discussion Questions

**** Please note, these questions contain spoilers ****

1. What does the prologue suggest to the reader about the story that is to come? How does it colour your view about Elsie, who you meet in Chapter 1, and later Mabel?
2. What does the title *Mad Mabel* suggest about perceptions and misperceptions of the protagonist? How is the label 'mad' used by certain characters throughout the book to deliberately try to malign or gaslight her?
3. Sally Hepworth uses humour and wit both to provide levity while she handles mature themes and difficult subjects, and also to build and illustrate her characters. What are some examples from the book that show this?
4. The Elsie we first meet is grumpy, irascible, inflexible, and yet still somehow endearing. How does the author achieve this? What are some of the ways Elsie changes during the course of the novel, and which characters and events play a part in this?
5. What are your thoughts on the portrayal of women's roles and expectations in the novel, particularly in the 'Then' chapters that portray the 1950s? What are some of the differences apparent in the 'Now' scenes from the present day?
6. Examine the significance of literature, and in particular, the novel *Anne of Green Gables*, in Mabel's life and personal growth. What does Ness's role as a librarian symbolise for her?
7. One of the major themes of the novel is friendship, particularly platonic friendship between females. What are some examples of this in the novel? What other forms of friendship are portrayed? Include in your discussion Elsie's neighbours on Kenny Lane, Persephone and Daphne.
8. How do the themes of belonging and identity manifest in Mabel's interactions with her family and community and later, in Elsie's?
9. How does the setting of Kenny Lane influence the story's atmosphere and themes? How does it contrast with the grand estate of Rosehill?
10. What is the significance of Mabel's diary in her journey of self-discovery?
11. How do the different generational perspectives enrich or complicate the narrative? Consider Libby and Adeem and the way they intend to tell Mabel's story. Do you think this is a good choice?
12. How does Elsie's relationship with Persephone affect her during the events of this novel? What is it about Persephone that prompts these changes, do you think?

13. There are many secrets and elements of mystery and suspense in the novel. Did you, as a reader, guess what these were before they became clear? If so, what signs helped you get there?
14. How does Mabel's relationship with Cess and Ness shape her character development throughout the novel?
15. Explore the theme of resilience as seen through Mabel's experiences. What are some of the elements in her life that shape this quality in her, despite the challenges she faces?
16. Did you sense the importance of the role Elsie's neighbour Peter plays in her life? What were some of the signs that led to the revelation of who he really is to Elsie?
17. The truth about Daphne is one of the major twists in *Mad Mabel*. Did you guess that she was in fact an imaginary friend? What are some of the signs throughout the novel that might suggest this?
18. How are themes of love and marriage explored in the novel? What are some of the successful partnerships, and what do you think makes them work? On the flipside, which relationships don't work, and why?

