

Susan Sellers
Vanessa and Virginia

Questions for Reading Groups

- Which of the two sisters do you feel most sympathy with – and why?
- The story is told from Vanessa's point of view. How does the fact that Vanessa is a painter influence the style of the novel? Is there any connection between painting and the short, fragmentary form of the narration?
- What effect does the fact that the novel is written in the second person (the 'you' form) have?
- To what extent do you think the sisters' story was shaped by the times they lived through?
- Does it matter that some aspects of the story are based on actual facts while some have been invented? What can fiction offer that biography doesn't?
- How important is it to the story of the sisters' lives that both women were artists?
- At an early point, Vanessa imagines pulling a triangle of purple lace from her mother's sewing basket, and this triangular motif resonates strongly throughout the rest of the novel. What other triangles are there in the novel? Why are they important?
- *Vanessa and Virginia* is primarily a novel about the relationship between sisters. What other relationships are prominent in the novel, and how do these affect the sisters' bond?
- Why do you think Vanessa rejects the love offered by Roger Fry, in favour of Duncan Grant?