

*And West is West* Reader's Guide Questions

1. The title and epigraph of the novel comes from Rudyard Kipling. Do you believe that “East is East and West is West, and never the two shall meet”? How is this separation shown in the novel? In what ways is the gap bridged?
2. The novel opens with drone pilot Jessica Aldridge on a remote mission that causes the deaths of two innocent young woman. How far, and in what ways, do the effects of collateral damage extend through the novel?
3. Ethan's bank job involves writing computer programs that take advantage of terrorism-related events. Is this aspect of his work immoral, or not? How so?
4. The use of contemporary devices—phones, laptops, computers—separates Jessica and Ethan from the immediate consequences of their work. How do you think the characters are affected by this remove? In what ways might technologically-enabled distancing affect your own life or work?
5. Why do you think the Lestons never told Zoe about her parents? Why did Walter leave this for Ethan to disclose?
6. Many characters in the novel are involved with drugs, both licitly and illicitly. Ethan uses Ritalin to stay focused at work and Ativan to calm himself. Zoe borrows Ethan's Ritalin, Porter's Xanax and Marla's muscle relaxants. Don was a drug dealer. Jessica shares from Shelly and Newt's marijuana stash. What are the negative and/or positive effects of all this drug use? How accurate, from your experience, is it to real life?
7. Jessica father had been an unreliable parent who had abandoned his wife and child. Why does the adult Jessica confide her deepest concerns with him, a convicted murderer serving time? Was her trust misplaced or justified?
8. Ethan claims that the end of life choice that Walter Leston makes for himself and his ailing wife is “the easy way out.” Would you agree that this is so?
9. What are Zoe's true feelings toward Ethan? And what are Ethan's true feelings about Zoe, both before and after Zoe's tragedy?
10. Daugherty and Pyle, the FBI agents tracking Jessica, are opposites in age and attitude. What causes Daugherty, who initially admires Pyle's capabilities and drive, to ultimately dislike his partner? What does he do about it? How far should Pyle be allowed to go in order to do his job?
11. Colonel Aldridge, Jessica's commanding officer, starts the novel as a by-the-book soldier. Is he the same person at the end of the story? How has he evolved?

12. When Ethan starts to take Zoe to all of their favorite places, it is a direct look at the effects of grieving over someone who's been lost. How else does loss and grief change Ethan? How do loss and grief change Jessica?

13. Does having lost their careers ultimately ruin Ethan's and Jessica's lives or redeem them?

14. Secrets are at the root of many crises in *And West is West*. Do you think secrets contribute to dysfunction in families and organizations? If not, how much secretiveness is necessary for society to function?