



Book Club Book of the Month: August 2020

We Can't Say We Didn't Know: Dispatches from an Age of Impunity, Sophie McNeill (ABC Books)

Summary

We Can't Say We Didn't Know by Sophie McNeill is an evocative and powerful book that thrusts readers into lives and locations devastated by war and oppression. In rough chronological order, McNeill movingly recounts the stories of those living in conflict zones such as Syria, Iraq, Gaza and Yemen. Drawing on her experience as a foreign correspondent in the Middle East, McNeill offers the human face of suffering and injustice, while conveying the courage of ordinary people caught up in these crises. She also highlights the difficulties of discerning the truth about such events in an age of disinformation and fake news. *We Can't Say We Didn't Know* is a must-read for anyone who cares about what is happening in the world.

About the author

Sophie McNeill is a Walkley Award winning journalist who has worked as a foreign correspondent across the Middle East region including Afghanistan, Israel, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Turkey and Gaza. Until recently, she was an investigative reporter for *Four Corners*, and has previously worked for ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* and SBS's *Dateline* programs. She has recently started a new role as the Australia researcher for Human Rights Watch. *We*

Can't Say We Didn't Know: Dispatches from an Age of Impunity is her first book.

Questions for discussion

1. Before reading, how much did you know about the people, events and conflicts that Sophie McNeill explores in the book?
2. Which stories and/or conflicts were familiar to you and which were totally new to you?
3. Whose story impacted you the most and why?
4. Which story did you find most challenging to read and why?
5. Reflect on the actions of one of the people McNeill writes about. How do you think you would have acted if you had been thrust into a similar situation?
6. Discuss the structure of the book. Why do you think the author chose to shape it the way she has?
7. What is the impact of the title and subtitle?
8. How did having the author weave her own story into the narrative affect your engagement with the book?
9. Sophie McNeill discusses the way misinformation is spread, particularly on social media. How can we verify whether something we read is accurate or not?
10. What was your initial reaction or response to the final two lines in the book?
11. Who do you know who has taken action to make a difference or respond to injustice?
12. How might you answer McNeill's final question? Individually? Collectively?

If you liked this book, you may also like...

The Palace of Angels, Mohammed Massoud Morsi, Wild Dingo Press

A Stolen Life: The Bruce Trevorrow Case, Antonio Buti, Fremantle Press

Father of the Lost Boys, Yuot A. Alaak, Fremantle Press

Shadow Lines, Stephen Kinnane, Fremantle Press

After This, Alice Nelson, Fremantle Press

Simply Ing, Helen Nellie (as told to Margaret O'Brien), Magabala Books

False Claims of Colonial Thieves, Charmaine Papertalk Green and John Kinsella, Magabala Books