

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Fredrik Backman is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *A Man Called Ove*, *My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry*, *Britt-Marie Was Here*, *Beartown*, *Us Against You*, and *Anxious People*, as well as two novellas and one work of nonfiction. His books are published in more than forty countries. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two children. - Author's website

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does hockey mean to the people of Beartown? What does winning the semifinal mean for the town's future?
2. The town and the parents of the Beartown junior hockey team place great expectations on the shoulders of 17-year-old boys. How does this pressure affect the boys? Have the club's leaders (David, Sune, Peter and the others) prepared the boys to deal with this pressure? Have the boys' parents?
3. How do issues related to social class affect the people of Beartown and the hockey club? Do those who live in the Hollow have a different world view from those who live in the Heights? Does hockey cut through class distinctions or reinforce them?
4. What does Kira's role as a working mother, and her job as a lawyer, mean to her? How does her job affect the way others treat her? Consider this passage from the novel:

“Not a second has passed since she had children without her feeling like a bad mother. For everything. For not understanding, for being impatient, for not knowing everything, not making better packed lunches, for still wanting more out of life than just being a mother. She hears other women in Beartown sigh behind her back: ‘Yes, but she has a full-time job, you know. Can you imagine?’” (p. 63)

5. How do Peter and Kira complement each other in their relationship? How does he make up for her weaknesses, and vice versa? Do you think they have a solid marriage? A happy one?
6. Peter loves hockey because it demands his all, his everything. What does hockey demand from each of the characters in the book? What does it take from them?
7. There are many different parents and styles of parenting portrayed in the book. Which parents do you think are the most successful at preparing their children for the real world? Why?
8. Consider this sentiment echoed throughout the book: “What is a community? It is the sum total of our choices.” (p. 312) By this definition, how do the townspeople of Beartown ultimately measure up? What kind of community have they built?
9. Several characters must find the courage to go against the grain of the tight-knit Beartown community. What is at stake for each character who does so, and is it worth it for them in the end?
10. Discuss the difference between male and female roles in the small village of Beartown. What is expected of the girls and women vs. the boys and men? Which characters break these expectations, and what are the consequences of doing so?
11. Consider the importance of names and nicknames throughout the novel. How does the lack of first names for “Kevin’s mother,” “Kevin’s father,” “David’s girlfriend,” and Benji’s “bass player” change your impression of them? What effect does calling Maya “the young woman” have on Maya and her own narrative? How does she start to reclaim her own story?
12. In the course of the novel, we see that playing on a sports team teaches young people values like loyalty, responsibility and commitment. But we also see instances of exclusion, aggression, and entitlement. Are there certain behaviors that are rewarded in a sports competition but considered inappropriate in daily life? Give examples. Which characters in the book have difficulty navigating this?
13. The events of the novel force the junior boys to grow up quickly as they are faced with very adult realities. What kind of man does Amat become over the course of the book? What do his actions reveal about him? What kind of man does Bobo become? Kevin? Benji?
14. Maya is surprised by how easily she can start to lie to her best friend, Ana, and keep secrets from her. How do each character’s secrets affect his or her relationship with loved ones? Consider the secrets between friends (Maya and Ana, Kevin and Benji, Amat and Zach), as well as those between parents and children, and husbands and wives.

15. How does Maya's final act shape her future? How does it shape Kevin's? Do you think a form of justice is achieved? Why or why not?
16. Why do you think Benji chooses to stay in Beartown and play for Sune's A-Team instead of following the others to Hed? Was his choice affected by his relationship with the bass player?
17. At the end of the novel, do you think the tradition of the Beartown Hockey Club continues? Has its fundamental character changed? How do you think it will change going forward?

<https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/beartown/guide>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Everyone knows Beartown is a hockey town. And everyone in Beartown knows someone who is connected to hockey, from the lonely owner of the local bar to the former athlete now managing the supermarket. In a town dying from economic decay and isolated by the surrounding wilderness, Beartown needs its junior hockey team to bring home the championship and bring in tourism and sponsorship dollars to keep the town alive. The son of a wealthy businessman and team patron, Kevin is the squad's superstar. Amat is an immigrant whose speed and skill on the ice may be his ticket to popularity. Maya is the daughter of the team's beloved general manager. When the paths of these three collide in the supercharged aftermath of a decisive game, the town's financial survival rests on the moral convictions of its most vulnerable citizens. The sentimentally savvy Backman (*A Man Called Ove*, 2014) takes a sobering and solemn look at the ways alienation and acceptance, ethics and emotions nearly destroy a small town. – Carol Haggas (Reviewed 03/01/2017)

Publisher's Weekly

The bestselling author of *A Man Called Ove* tells a poignant story of a hockey town paralyzed by scandal. Jobs are disappearing and Beartown is slowly dying, so for its citizens, hockey is everything. Backman asks, "Why does everyone care about hockey? Because hockey tells stories." This is the story not just of hockey, but of a 15-year-old named Maya Andersson, whose father, Peter, the general manager of the hockey club, loves hockey, but loves his family more. Seventeen-year-old Kevin Erdahl is the star of Beartown, with a chance to go professional. One night, after a huge win, Maya goes to a raucous party at Kevin's house and is thrilled at his attention, but things get out of hand, and what takes place changes Beartown forever. Lest readers think hockey is the star here, it's Backman's rich characters that steal the show, and his deft handling of tragedy and its effects on an insular town. While the story is dark at times, love, sacrifice, and the bonds of friendship and family shine through, ultimately offering hope and even redemption. Backman veers close to the saccharine, but readers may be too spellbound to notice. (Apr.)

School Library Journal

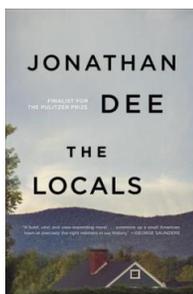
In rural Sweden, a team of junior hockey players are on the cusp of changing everything for Beartown. If the players can win the championship, the small town may attract new businesses, improve its ailing economy, and recover its dignity. Everyone, from the local bar owner to the mother who cleans the rink, is linked to the boys and has a stake in whether they win or lose, making the teammates demigods within the community. After a night of celebrating a

memorable semifinals win, the star player is accused of raping the general manager's daughter. The community must decide between holding the alleged rapist accountable, and thereby forfeiting their chances at success, and overlooking the crime. While this book has Backman's deep character development, it has none of the lightheartedness or mysticism of his previous best sellers, such as *A Man Called Ove*. This is a serious look at how the actions of one or two people can affect an entire town. VERDICT This title deserves a place on high school shelves for its complex characters and tight narrative. Schools with avid hockey fans won't want to miss it.— Krystina Kelley, Belle Valley School, Belleville, IL --Krystina Kelley (Reviewed 09/01/2017) (School Library Journal, vol 63, issue 9, p154)

Kirkus Reviews

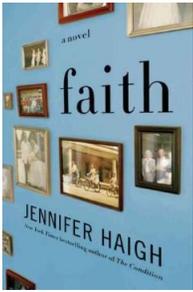
In Beartown, where the people are as "tough as the forest, as hard as the ice," the star player on the beloved hockey team is accused of rape, and the town turns upon itself. Swedish novelist Backman's (*A Man Called Ove*, 2014, etc.) story quickly becomes a rich exploration of the culture of hockey, a sport whose acolytes see it as a violent liturgy on ice. Beartown explodes after rape charges are brought against the talented Kevin, son of privilege and influence, who's nearly untouchable because of his transcendent talent. The victim is Maya, the teenage daughter of the hockey club's much-admired general manager, Peter, another Beartown golden boy, a hockey star who made it to the NHL. Peter was lured home to bring winning hockey back to Beartown. Now, after years of despair, the local club is on the cusp of a championship, but not without Kevin. Backman is a masterful writer, his characters familiar yet distinct, flawed yet heroic. Despite his love for hockey, where fights are part of the game, Peter hates violence. Kira, his wife, is an attorney with an aggressive, take-no-prisoners demeanor. Minor characters include Sune, "the man who has been coach of Beartown's A-team since Peter was a boy," whom the sponsors now want fired. There are scenes that bring tears, scenes of gut-wrenching despair, and moments of sly humor: the club president's table manners are so crude "you can't help wondering if he's actually misunderstood the whole concept of eating." Like *Friday Night Lights*, this is about more than youth sports; it's part coming-of-age novel, part study of moral failure, and finally a chronicle of groupthink in which an unlikely hero steps forward to save more than one person from self-destruction. A thoroughly empathetic examination of the fragile human spirit, Backman's latest will resonate a long time. (Kirkus Reviews, March 1, 2017)

READALIKES



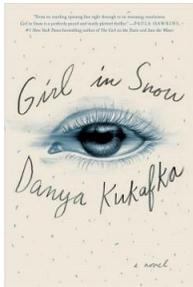
***The Locals* by Jonathan Dee**

A rural, working-class town in New England elects as its mayor a New York hedge fund millionaire who slowly transforms the community in his image, triggering unexpected changes in the life of a financially strapped contractor and his extended family.



***Faith* by Jennifer Haigh**

When her older brother Art--the popular, dynamic pastor of a large suburban parish--finds himself at the center of the scandal, Sheila McGann, estranged from her family for years, returns to Boston, ready to fight for him and his reputation--until she discovers the truth.



***Girl in Snow* by Danya Kukafka**

When fifteen-year-old Lucinda Hayes is found dead in her sleepy Colorado suburb, the secret lives of three people connected to her are revealed: the social outcast who loved her from afar, the jaded girl who despised her, and the policeman investigating her death.