

## Before We Were Yours by Lisa Wingate Discussion Questions

- 1. BEFORE WE WERE YOURS** alternates between the historical story of the Foss Children and the modern-day story of Avery Stafford. Did you have a favorite between these story lines? Which one and why?
2. Many families have been touched in some way by adoption and foster care. Is adoption or foster care in your family history? If so, how did that affect your thoughts about the journey of the Foss children and about Avery's excavation of her family history?
3. When the sisters were originally reunited, they decided to keep their history to themselves rather than telling their families. Do you agree or disagree with this decision? What do you think the implications would have been if they had gone public? Do you think family secrets should remain secret, particularly after the people who kept those secrets have passed away? Or do family secrets belong to the next generation, as well? Have you ever discovered a secret in your family history? If so, what was it (if you care to share it, that is)?
4. "There was a little girl who had a little curl..." is a touchstone between Avery and her Grandma Judy. Is there a song or saying that reminds you of someone special in your childhood? Where does your mind travel when you hear it or repeat it?
5. Avery laments that the busy schedule expected of a Stafford has prevented her from spending time on Edisto Island with her sisters or Elliot. "Who chooses the schedules we keep? We do, I guess," she tells herself but excuses this with, "the good life demands a lot of maintenance." In our modern age are we too busy? Too preoccupied with accumulating things to actually enjoy what we have? Too dialed into media and social media? What are your thoughts on this? What would you like to change about your own schedule? Anything? What might you gain if you did?
6. While Rill sees her life on the Arcadia through the idyllic eyes of childhood, May in her old age seems to acknowledge that she wouldn't have traded the life she lived for a different one. Do you think she wonders whether Queenie and Briny's unconventional existence on the Arcadia could have been sustainable as times changed or more children were added to the family? Were Queenie and Briny responsible or careless in their choices?
7. May says, "A woman's past need not predict her future. She can dance to her own music if she chooses." How has your past made you who you are? What do you want to leave behind? Anything? What is the true "music" of your own soul? Are you in step with it or out of step? What helps you hear your own music and find balance in your life?

- 8.** When fear of being caught threatens to prevent her from escaping Miss Murphy's house, Rill tells herself, "I shush my mind because your mind can ruin you if you let it." Does your mind ever ruin you? In what way? On what issues? May comments, "We're always trying to persuade ourselves of things." Are women particularly guilty of this? What do we tell ourselves that we shouldn't?
- 9.** Child trafficking, abuse and economic disadvantage still imperil the lives and futures of children today. What can we as ordinary citizens do to prevent children from being robbed of safe, happy childhoods? What can society do to prevent people like Georgia Tann from taking advantage of the most helpless and vulnerable among us?
- 10.** Did you search for more information about Georgia Tann and the Tennessee Children's Home Society after reading *BEFORE WE WERE YOURS*? What did you learn? Based on what you learned, what do you think motivated Georgia Tann? Why were so many people willing to be complicit in her schemes when they knew children were suffering? Was Georgia's network a creature of the political corruption and societal attitudes of its time or could something like this happen today?
- 11.** Avery feels the pressure of being in a high-profile political family. Do you think famous families are held to a higher standard than others? Should they be? Has this changed in recent years or is it just harder to keep secrets in today's media-crazed world?
- 12.** How did Avery grow as a result of her discoveries about the family's past? How did it change her view of herself and her family's expectations for her? Did your family have expectations for you that you didn't agree with? Who in Avery's family might struggle most to accept her decision to change her life plans?
- 13.** Do you think there will be a happily-ever-after ending for Avery and Trent? In your view, what might that look like?
- 14.** How would you describe Rill as she struggles through the abduction, the orphanage, and her decision to return to her adoptive family? Did you admire her? What changes did you see in her as a result of the experience? How is she different when she gets to the Sevier's house?
- 15.** Avery struggles to come to terms with Grandma Judy's dementia. Her family wrestles with difficult choices about Grandma Judy's care. Has memory loss and elder care affected your family? In what way? What issues did it cause and how did you deal with them? Have you imagined what it would be like to be a victim of memory loss?
- 16.** The Seviars seem to have adopted the Foss girls with good intentions. Do you think they were aware of or at all suspicious of Georgia Tann's methods? Should they have been?

**17.** What symbolism do you see in the picture of the sisters on the wall? How do you think the sisters felt during their Sisters Days? Do you have sisters you are close to or sister-friends you spend time with? What does that bond mean to you?

**18.** Did you wish all seven of the Foss siblings could have found one another in the end? In your opinion, would that have been realistic or unrealistic? Why do you think the author chose not to bring all of the siblings back together?

**19.** This novel has garnered worldwide interest in the publishing industry and is being translated for publication in at least fourteen countries. Why do you think the story drew international attention? What themes in it are universal?

**20.** Was the cover a factor in your book club's decision to read **BEFORE WE WERE YOURS**? What reaction did you have to the cover and title?

**21.** Will you be passing the book on to someone else? Will it remain on your bookshelf? Will you give a copy to someone you know?