

Reading Group Guide
BEFORE HE FINDS HER
By Michael Kardos

AUTHOR BIO

Michael Kardos is the Pushcart Prize-winning author of the novels *Before He Finds Her* and *The Three-Day Affair*, the story collection *One Last Good Time*, and a book on writing, *The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer's Guide*. His books have been named a Best Book of the Year by *Esquire* and have won the Mississippi Institute of Arts & Letters Award for fiction. Michael grew up on the Jersey Shore, received a degree in music from Princeton University, and played the drums professionally for a number of years. He has an M.F.A. in fiction from The Ohio State University and a Ph.D. from the University of Missouri. He currently lives in Starkville, Mississippi, where he is an associate professor of English and co-director of the creative writing program at Mississippi State University.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- To what extent does Melanie Denison, despite her unusual upbringing, seem like an ordinary 17-year-old? To what extent does she seem older—or younger—than her actual age?
- How do your sympathies for the main characters change over the course of the novel?
- One of the novel's epigraphs, by Sherwood Anderson, begins, "It was the truths that made the people grotesques." What does the novel suggest might be some of the damaging effects in holding on to unwavering beliefs? What are some "truths" that different characters in the novel hold on to?
- In what ways does the town of Silver Bay conform—or not—to your own sense of the Jersey Shore? What impression of the Jersey Shore does the novel make?
- How would you characterize the marriage between Ramsey and Allison Miller? How does it change over time? Do you know couples who relate to each other the way that they do?
- When she first goes on the road, Melanie experiences the high of driving much as Ramsey once did. ("If there was a better feeling than being behind the wheel, chugging along an open road on a sunny morning, she couldn't imagine what it would be," page 111.) Do you find other similarities between father and daughter?

- Allison Miller’s point-of-view doesn’t enter the novel until page 243 (Chapter 18). Why do you think the author might have chosen to wait so long? Why include it at all?
- What about David Magruder’s personality do you think led him to become a weatherman? What are some of the ways that weather plays a role in this novel?
- Despite having very different personalities from each other, Eric Pace and Ramsey Miller become fast friends. What does each man see in the other? How do they complement each other?
- Why does Ramsey believe it’s so important for him to host the block party? What does he hope to achieve?
- To what extent does Ramsey fear that Doomsday is coming? To what extent does he long for it?
- Part Two of the novel begins, “His was a love story, but the love came later.” To what degree is *Before He Finds Her* a story about love?
- William Faulkner wrote, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” How might this quote apply to *Before He Finds Her*?
- Arthur Goodale’s final blog post is centered on the idea of being wrong. Do you find yourself agreeing with him (and with the quoted passage from *American Pastoral*), that being wrong is “how we know we’re alive” (page 357)?
- In his final blog post, Arthur Goodale reminds his followers, “Don’t believe everything you read” (page 360). In what ways does his advice have thematic significance?
- What about the novel did you find most surprising?
- Okay—go for it: Who should play these people in the movie?

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