

## Before We Were Yours Discussion Questions

by Lisa Wingate

### Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Lisa Wingate website)

Lisa Wingate is a former journalist, inspirational speaker, and New York Times Bestselling Author of thirty novels. Her work has won or been nominated for many awards, including the Pat Conroy Southern Book Prize, the Oklahoma Book Award, the Utah Library Award, The Carol Award, the Christy Award, and the RT Booklovers Reviewer's Choice Award.



Lisa writes her stories at home in Texas where she is part of the Wingate clan of storytellers. Lisa believes that stories can change the world.

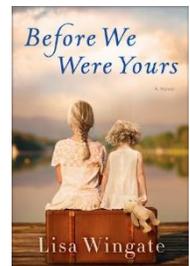
### Characters:

- **Avery Stafford** – (30) – Brainiac daughter of Senator Wells Stafford. Lawyer. Avery is the presumed senatorial heir. Has a fiancé – Elliot. Is the youngest of 3 sisters. Her sisters are Allison and Missy. Allison has 4 kids – Courtney (10) and triplet 2-year old boys. Missy has 2 teenage children.
- **May (Weathers) Crandall** – (90) – Musician. Recently brought to live in a nursing facility. Found at home with her cats and the dead body of her sister. Had 3 husbands. Unhappy with being away from home. Uncooperative with staff. (Was once Rill Foss).
- **Bitsy** – Elliot's mother. Avery's future mother-in-law. Society matron.
- **Miss Dodd** – Kind woman who worked at the Tennessee Children's Home for a short time. Spoke up for the kids and was fired.
- **Foss Family** – Briny - father, Queenie – mother, Rill (12), Camellia (10), Lark (6), Fern (4), and Gabion (2) is the only boy. Queenie is pregnant with twins. Difficult birth. Queenie and 4 of the 5 kids are blonde and blue eyed. Only Briny and Camellia have dark hair.
  - Live on a houseboat called the Arcadia Kingdom. Houseboat is temporarily anchored near Memphis, Tennessee.
  - Rill is renamed May. Lark is renamed Bonnie. Fern is renamed Beth. Gabion is renamed Robby.
- **Leslie** – Senator Stafford's press secretary.
- **Miss Murphy** – Cruel woman who worked at the Tennessee Children's Home.
- **Mrs. Pulnik** – Woman who worked at the Tennessee Children's Home.
- **Mr. Riggs** – Man who did maintenance at the Tennessee Children's Home. Kept peppermints for the kids. Mrs. Murphy's cousin.
- **Seviers** – Man and woman who adopted Fern and May. Darren is a successful Hollywood musician. Victoria has had multiple miscarriages and has depression.
  - **Zuma** is the Sevier's maid.
  - **Hootsie** – Zuma's daughter.
- **Silas** – Riverboat boy who lived with Zede. Friends with Rill.

- **Judy (Myers) Stafford** – (70's) – “Grandma Judy” – Avery’s grandmother. Quick witted and fun loving. Currently in an elder facility with dementia.
- **Wells Stafford** – (57) – Senator for South Carolina. Is a third-generation senator from a “significant” family. Has colon cancer. Wife – Honeybee is a society matron. They have 3 daughters, Allison, Missy, and Avery.
- **Stevie** – 4-year-old boy who taken from his river boat parents. He and his sister are taken to the Tennessee Children’s Home. She disappears and May semi-adopts him while she is at the group home.
- **Georgia Tann** – Woman in charge of the Tennessee Children’s Home Society. (Opened in the 20’s and was shut down in 1950.) Well knows for mitigating the stigma of adoption. Later found to have kidnapped/stolen most of the children in her group homes. She abused and even killed children under her care. Died of cancer in 1950.
- **Trent Turner III** – Real estate agent in Edisto. Has a letter for Grandma Judy from his grandfather, Trent Turner I. Has a son, Jonah, who is 3 years old.
- **Zede** – Older riverboat owner. Briny’s friend.
- **Tennessee Children’s Home Society** – (1920’s to 1950)
  - Orphanages and group homes for unwanted children
  - Operated by Georgia Tann.
  - Made adoption an acceptable practice
  - Kidnapped kids from poor families and sold they to rich, famous, or influential people.
  - Charged exorbitant prices for adoptions
  - Bribed police, politicians, etc. with money and children to look the other way
  - 500+ children died from neglect, abuse, and murder.
  - Operated under Boss Crump – Memphis’s notorious political kingpin.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. 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?
3. **Before We Were Yours** alternates between the historical story of the Foss Children (1939) and the modern-day story of Avery Stafford. Did it work? Did you have a favorite between these story lines? Which one and why?
4. Why do you think Avery tries so hard to figure out the mystery of May, Grandma Judy, and the Acadia at the beginning of the book?
5. Avery feels the pressure of being in a high-profile political family. Do you 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?
6. Do you think Queenie and Briny were at fault for losing their children? Was it viable for them to have more children? What could they have done (if anything) to keep their family together?



7. When the sisters were originally reunited as adults, 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?
8. How did you feel about Rill as you see her struggle against the abduction and then at the orphanage? Do you think she was brave?
9. What does it reveal about Rill's character that she goes back to the Seviars after her attempt to leave them to get back to Acadia?
10. Many families have been touched in some way by adoption and foster care. Is adoption or foster care in your family history? If so, did that affect your thoughts about the journey of the Foss children and about Avery digging into her family's history?
11. Avery struggles to come to terms with Grandma Judy's dementia. Her family wrestles with difficult choices about Grandma Judy's care. What issues did it cause? Have you imagined what it would be like to be a victim of memory loss?
12. 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?
13. We never find out what really happens to Camilla at the Home. Why do you think the author left us wondering?
14. Did you know who Grandma Judy was before it was revealed? If yes, what clue gave it away?
15. Do you think there will be a happily-ever-after ending for Avery and Trent? In your view, what might that look like?
16. Did you wish all seven of the Foss siblings could have found one another in the end? Would that have been realistic or unrealistic? Why do you think the author chose not to bring all of the siblings back together?
17. It's mentioned several times that Georgia Tann helped to change the stigma of adoption from a negative to a positive. Do you think that this largely positive impact to society counterbalances in any way the harm she did in individual lives of children who may not have needed adoption, like Rill? Why or why not?
18. 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?
19. Did you search for more information about Georgia Tann and the Tennessee Children's Home Society after reading **Before We Were Yours**?
20. Why were so many people willing to be complicit in Tann's 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?
21. Wingate has written a number of other books. Will you read them?

## References:

- Arlene's Book Club – <https://arlenesbookclub.com/before-we-were-yours-book-club-discussion-questions/>
- Book Club Bites – <https://bookclubbites.com/before-we-were-yours-book-club-questions-and-recipe/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/w/lisa-wingate/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/32148570-before-we-were-yours>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=0ff21adb-5f03-415a-957b-6aa80489adf1%40sdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10560371&db=neh>
- Lisa Wingate website – <https://lisawingate.com/>
- Lit Lovers -- <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11041-before-we-were-yours-wingate?start=3>

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## Lisa Wingate Books

### Tending Roses

1. Tending Roses (2001)
2. Good Hope Road (2003)
3. The Language of Sycamores (2005)
4. Drenched in Light (2006)
5. A Thousand Voices (2007)

### Texas Hill Country

1. Texas Cooking (2003)
2. Lone Star Cafe (2004)
3. Over the Moon at the Big Lizard Diner (2005)

### Blue Sky Hills

1. A Month of Summer (2008)
2. The Summer Kitchen (2009)
3. Beyond Summer (2010)
4. Dandelion Summer (2011)

### Daily, Texas

1. Talk of the Town (2008)
2. Word Gets Around (2009)
3. Never Say Never (2010)

### Moses Lake

1. Larkspur Cove (2011)
2. Blue Moon Bay (2012)
3. Firefly Island (2013)
4. Wildwood Creek (2014)

### Carolina Chronicles

- 0.5. The Sea Glass Sisters (2013)
1. The Prayer Box (2013)
- 1.5. The Tidewater Sisters (2014)
2. The Story Keeper (2014)
- 2.5. The Sandcastle Sister (2015)
3. The Sea Keeper's Daughters (2015)

### Outer Banks

1. A Sandy's Seashell Shop Christmas (2014)

### **Stand Alone Novels:**

- Before We Were Yours (2016)
- The Book of Lost Friends (2020)

### **Nonfiction**

- Before and After (2019) (with Judy Pace Christie)

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### **If you liked Before We Were Yours, try...**

- The Lost Girls of Paris – Pam Jenoff
  - Orphan Train – Christina Baker Kline
  - Before and After – Judy Pace Christie
  - Necessary Lies – Diane Chamberlain
  - The Nightingale – Kristin Hannah
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